10
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STORIES

argosy

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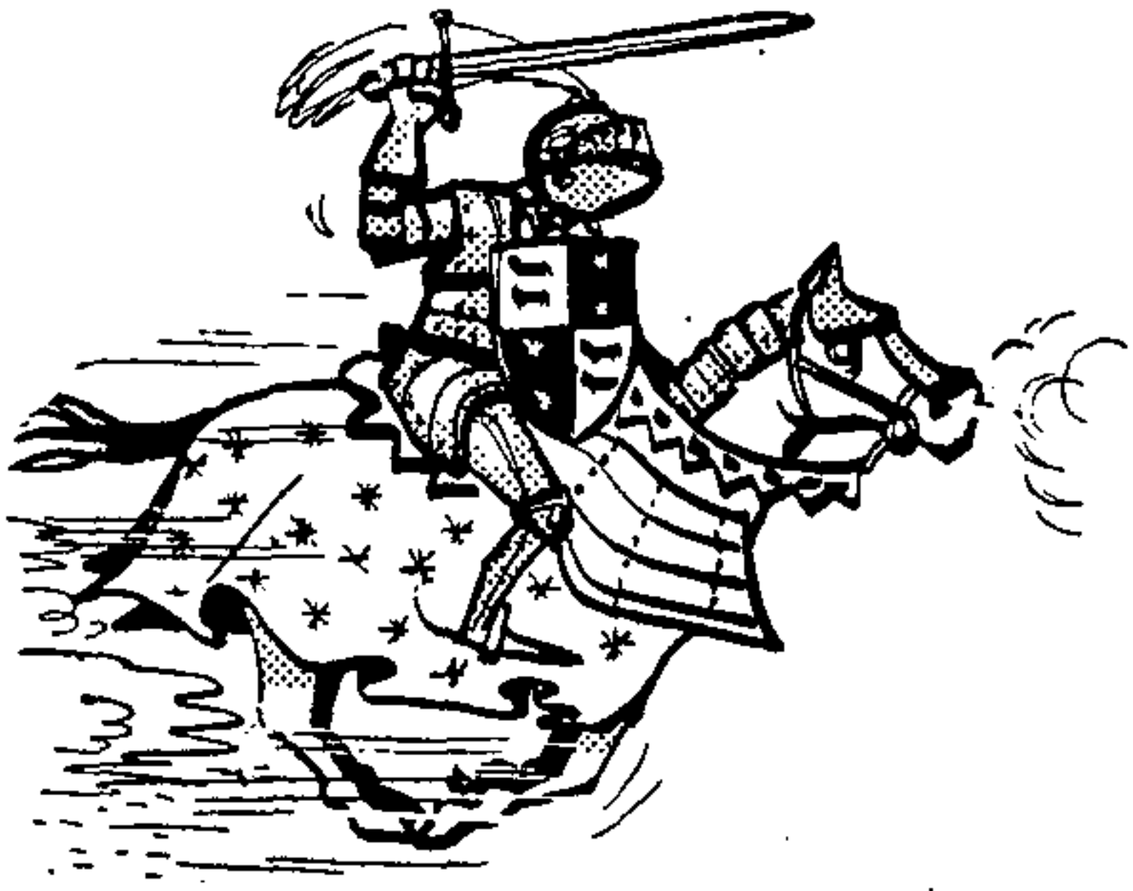
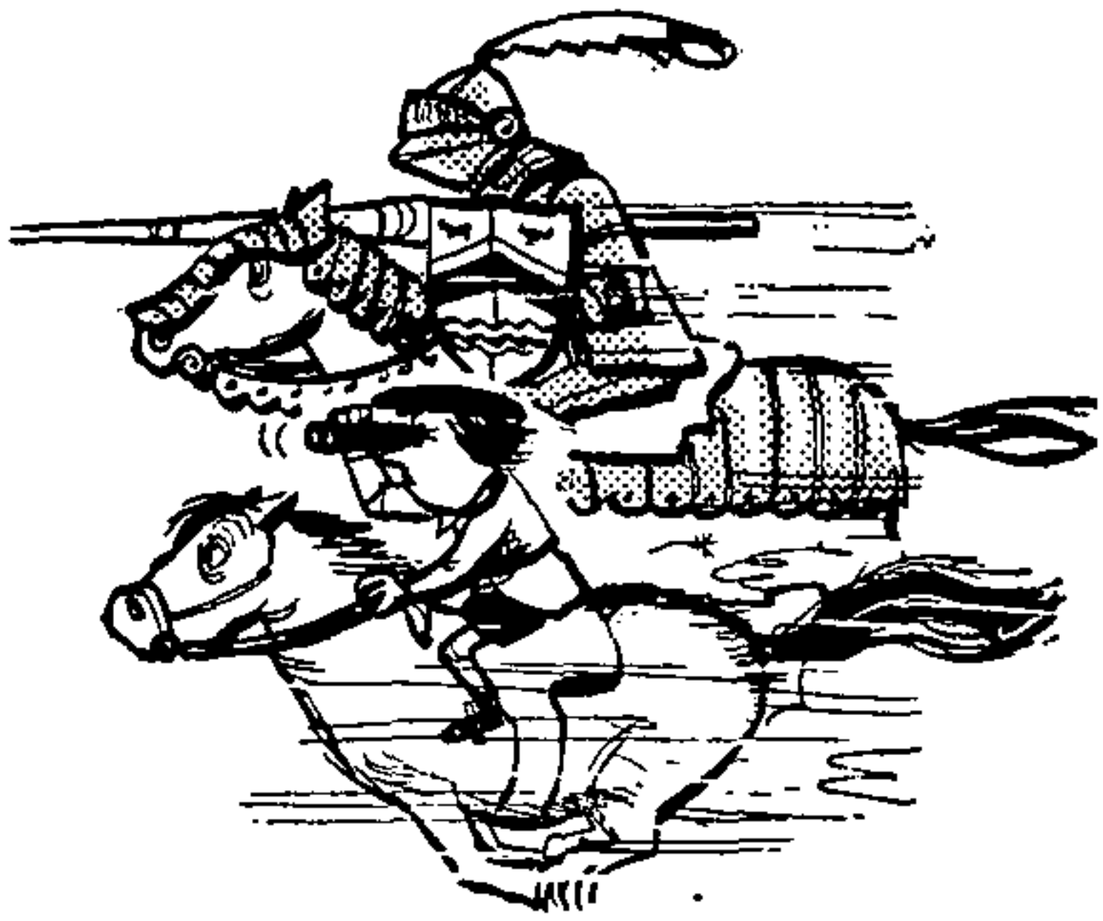
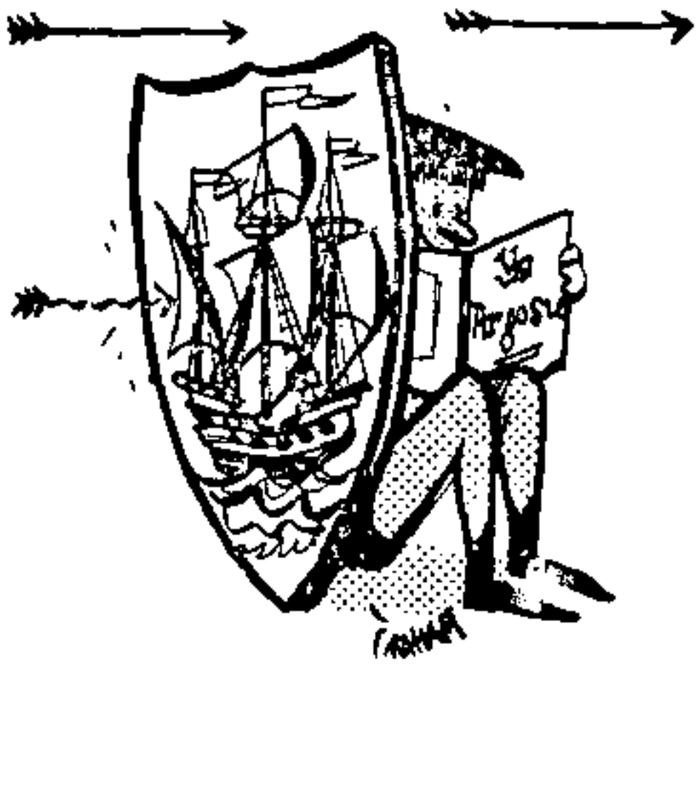


Joust a Minute



A knight in the
chivalrous age
Ran the gauntlet and
threw down
the gage
But *you* can sit still—
For adventure and thrill
Joust tourney an Argosy page



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woman's Journal

EVERY MONTH—PRICE THREE SHILLINGS

argosy

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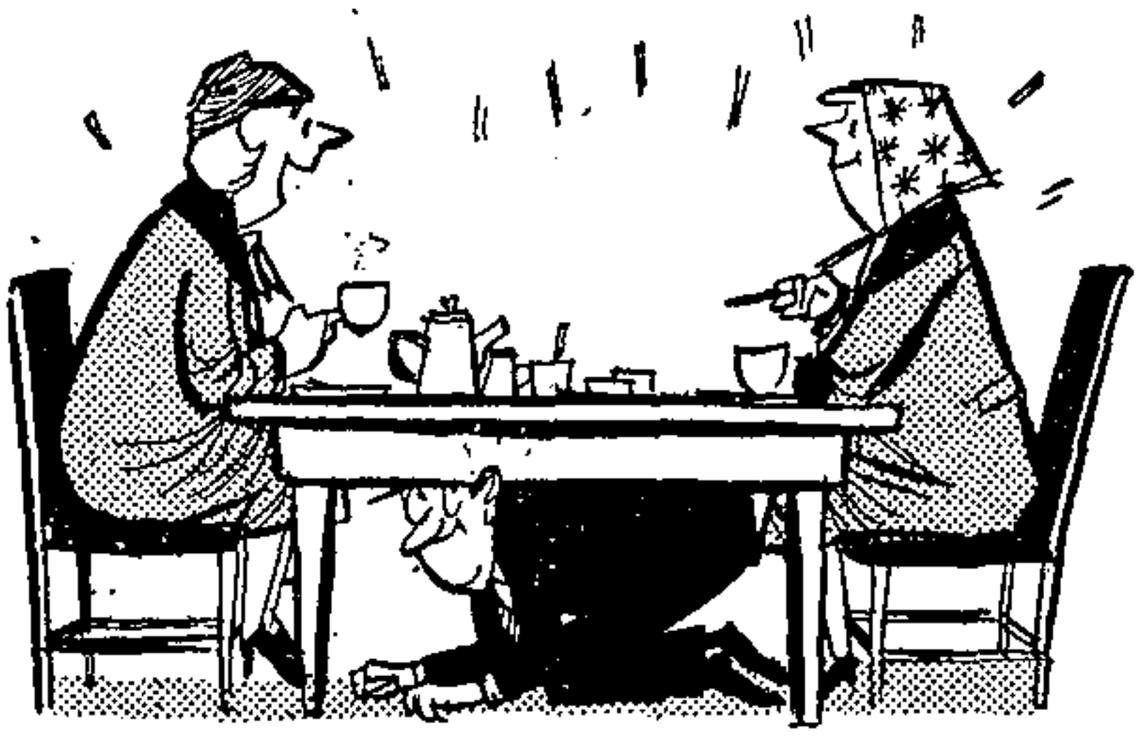


Log Book

SOME people read fiction. Some get more of a kick out of memoirs. We ourselves—apart from reading Argosy—are inveterate listeners-in to conversations in pubs, trains, and buses. The material we glean that way supplies us with far more food for thought than *Seen in Seven Decades* by Lady Mary Potley-Smith.

For instance there were the two old ladies in the ABC, one of whom said to the other, "There you are, dear, what could you do? The girl had just tipped Father's ashes into her dustpan, you couldn't very well *say* anything."

Or the suave-looking professorial man overheard on a doorstep in a small street south of the Thames, blandly countering a dogged female who was trying to sell him factory-to-consumer carpet by, "So kind of you, *so* kind. But quite needless for us, I fear. Our house is *nice* and damp—we just grow a thick carpet of—"

This kind of listening-in can be even more frustrating, when one picks up a snatch like, "Well, you know my Aunt Messalina. You know her cat—the one who won't drink milk unless it's laced with rum. They've got a new milkman now, teetotal, Band of Hope, and on Saturday morning this milkman came to the house—early in the morning it was, long before Aunt Lena was up—with about five yards of blue ribbon, and he—"

Whenever a deathly hush falls over the Argosy offices and typewriters stop clattering, it is probably because the staff are all brooding over the different possible fates of Aunt Messalina's cat.

Another very tantalising conversation, overheard in a hotel lounge, was between two businessmen who were waiting for a third. The expected man, it appeared, was a biologist. "He works for a big Scottish self-service store."

"Really? What sort of work does he do?"

"Rather like an insurance investigator. When people claim they've found blackbeetles in loaves or mice in pies Harry inspects the specimens to see if the claims are genuine."

"You'd hardly think there'd be enough work for him."

"Oh, they get plenty—beetles in tins of pineapple, things like that. For a time he was keeping a bird-eating spider that turned up in a bunch of bananas. Well, one evening he got home and found a note from his wife: '*Spider not in cage. Have gone to Aunt Ethel's.*' You'll never guess where he found the spider—"

A page was bawling, "Mr. Lockspur! Mr. Lockspur! Wanted on the phone."

The story-teller jumped up. "I wonder if that's Harry now. He's very late."

We still sometimes look under the bed at night in case Harry's bird-eating spider has dropped in.

Quite the most teasing bit of talk we overheard recently was between two men in the London tube, one jampacked rush-hour. We never even saw their faces, merely heard a voice saying, "Did I ever tell you the story of the mushroom?" It was the voice of a real raconteur, the sort of rich voice that makes you relax and put your mental feet up.

"No," his companion said.

"Well, there were only two officers in charge. A couple of days before this happened they Hoovered the parade-ground. Lord, those Germans are thorough! You could have rolled out pastry on that parade-ground."

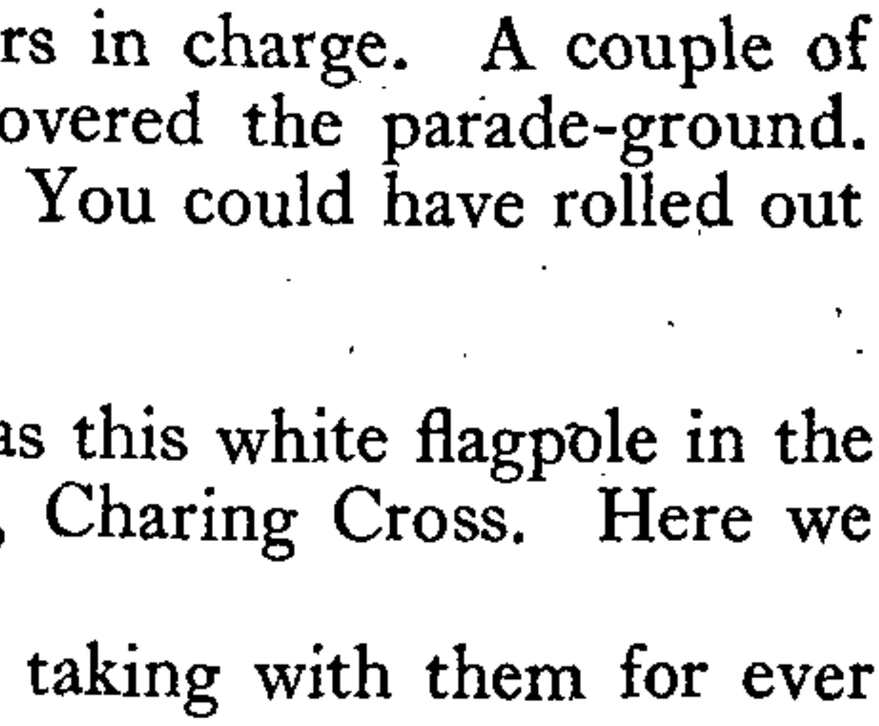
"What about the mushroom?"

"I was coming to that. There was this white flagpole in the middle of the parade-ground— Ah, Charing Cross. Here we are."

They got out, two military types, taking with them for ever the secret of the mushroom.

We wish we could promise that next month's Argosy would bring you the end of this gripping affair, but it won't. We do, however, offer a prize of two guineas to the reader who sends us the most plausible follow-up story, in not more than sixty words on a postcard, to The Editor, Argosy, Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.

If the real narrator writes with the real solution he'll get a year's free subscription to Argosy as well.



JOHN SILVER

TIME TO KILL

BY KEM BENNETT

THE gardens and courtyards of the Palais-Royal were as familiar to Aristide Leblanc as his bed or the faces of his children. He knew the keepers of the shops under the colonnades, the owners of the apartments above the shops, the actors and actresses, directors, dressers, and stage-hands of the Comédie française, the civil servants who worked in various parts of the old palace itself and the ever-changing ministers who bullied and instructed them.

He knew the nursemaids who brought their charges to play in the sandpits of the garden and the business girls who ate their sandwich lunches on the benches by the fountains. He knew the gardens themselves with the completeness of a proprietor, and the statuary, the terrazzo pavements, the fountains, and facades with the same intimacy.

Of the statues, a nineteenth-century piece glorifying the Spirit of Roman Genius struck him as particularly beautiful and inspiring. This, consequently, was his favourite and once, when he had clapped his hands to frighten the pigeons away —because they dealt shamefully with the Spirit of Roman Genius, as they did with all the other surfaces in the structure of the palace—an old man had remarked that he was glad to find a policeman who preferred art to pigeons.

After that Aristide had come to think of himself as curiously responsible for the Palais-Royal, not only for its peace—for which he was indeed responsible—but for its fabric, its meaning, and its serenity. He found that the sense of added responsibility was, rather to his surprise, a gift instead of a burden; it put something joyful into his day's work and he was wise enough and African enough to recognise a man's need for this kind of thing.

To be called Leblanc and yet to be very, very black was—or

could have been—a cruel trick of inter-racial inheritance, but Aristide had long ago become so used to the jokes that they had ceased even to be pin-pricks. When they were made—cyclically, in more or less month-long bursts every year or so—he grinned a lot and was liked for it. He was the happier for being liked; so, in a way, being a jet-black Leblanc had become one of his advantages.

He was forty-five, his maternal grandfather had been a trader's bastard in Dahomey, he had two children and no wife, for she was dead; he had been doing the afternoon to midnight stint at the Palais-Royal for ten years, and he was large and kind and had not the waspish quality which characterises too many of the Paris police.

Aristide found the parcel tucked under one of the benches,

more or less in the middle of the rectangle of the gardens, and, in the first instance, did no more about it than to fish it out from under the seat and place it on the plinth of the Spirit of Roman Genius so that he would not forget to take it when he passed that way again. It was not his job to clear away litter or abandoned parcels from the gardens, but he often did, prompted by the feeling of personal responsibility which had become part of him.

Under the colonnades and in various sheltered spots among the arcades and entrances to the Palais-Royal gardens, Aristide found that night the customary number of sleeping derelicts. He let them lie, as usual, after having made sure that they had not been making use of any of the niches as lavatories, for this was a defilement he would not tolerate. Then, thinking all of a sudden about the Algerian problem, he retraced his steps to the monument to pick up the parcel. Because Aristide was emotionally both a Frenchman and a negro, the dramas of dying African colonialism interested and perturbed him; he reflected in himself, after all, the very contradictions and conflicts that were discussed daily in the newspapers.

He had his fingers round the parcel when, with riot and nationalism in mind, it occurred to him that it might contain explosive.

As soon as the thought came it was intuitively confirmed and he knew, with a certainty far deeper than logical persuasion, that the thing was a bomb.

He withdrew his hand slowly and stepped back, his eyes fixed on the parcel, his fingers instinctively drawing his night-cape about him, for the shock of his certainty had chilled him.

It was a commonplace package, wrapped in brown paper of inferior quality, tied with rough but clean new string, weighing, he thought, about a kilogram. He stared at it, trying to estimate its dangerousness, while his logical mind, unimpressed by intuitive certainty, skirmished with possibilities.

Was it a bomb? If so, why had it been left here in a wide-open space in a public garden? What ought to be done about it? Would he—and this was the most worrying of the questions—would he be believed if he rang through to the commissariat to report his discovery and his conviction that it was perilous?

It took him nearly a minute to realise that he had better do something, for the longer he delayed the more dangerous the parcel could become. He was briefly tempted to drop it into the basin of one of the fountains, but then he remembered the war and the sight of beach mines exploding under water, and knew that immersion was not necessarily an effective disarmament for

an explosive charge. Presently, setting his big teeth, he forced himself to return to the parcel, to kneel and press his ear to it. It was not ticking.

He stood up and cursed it for not ticking; had it been ticking everything would have been neat and conclusive. Nevertheless, his mind was made up, and he turned and ran heavily towards the exit closest to the Comédie française, beyond which lay a police telephone post. . .

The black-and-white Renault with the winking red beacon on its roof pulled into the Palais-Royal courtyard and Lieutenant Perrier got out.

He was a short, thickset man with a tobacco-stained bushy moustache and a matter-of-fact demeanour. He smoked expensive English cigarettes which he rolled backwards and forwards between his lips with the tip of his tongue, hardly ever inhaling but allowing the smoke to fumigate his head as if its action could have an inhibiting effect upon the imaginative process.

This inhibition he needed, as an explosives expert, for imagination working too wantonly could have made his trade a lifelong torment. He gave an impression of great steadiness and sturdiness, which made it seem likely that his English cigarettes would be his only extravagance.

Aristide Leblanc saluted, because Perrier was both a stranger and a superior.

"Where is it?" Perrier asked.

"Over by the big statue, mon lieutenant."

Perrier nodded, grunted, "Wait," to his driver and moved forward.

Aristide said, "I wondered whether to drop it into the fountain. Would that have been correct?"

Perrier shook his head, unsmiling. "Since I am not devoted to paddling, it would have been incorrect," he said. "I am glad you resisted the temptation."

The negro laughed, delighted to have done something right—even so passive a thing as this. He was still uncertain.

"How do you know this is a bomb?" Perrier demanded.

Aristide frowned and shrugged. "I cannot say that I know," he admitted doubtfully. "I think it is. It is very difficult to explain . . ."

Perrier nodded; then suddenly smiled, charmingly, with his cigarette rolled away to one side of his mouth. "Even if it turns out to be birdseed," he said, "don't worry that I shall be angry. I like people who prefer to be safe than sorry."

The moon had risen and the parcel looked bigger and more meaningful in its light.

When the two policemen were about twenty yards away Perrier took Aristide gently by the elbow. "Stay here, mon gars," he said. "Better lie down—or you could lie behind the parapet of the fountain over there."

"Do you not need help?" Aristide asked.

"I doubt it. If I do, I can call."

Aristide hesitated, wanting to argue, but Perrier had walked forward, giving him no chance. Aristide went to kneel behind the parapet of the fountain. Only when Perrier turned and gestured fiercely did he lie down.

He felt the hardness of the packed earth beneath his ribs and smelled, with sharpened senses, the shaly scent of it. Presently, because his desire to be involved less passively in something which so dangerously concerned the peace of the Palais-Royal was too strong to be resisted, he edged his way forward until he could see round the curve of the parapet.

Perrier had reached the parcel and was examining it by the light of a powerful torch that he had brought with him from the car. Aristide saw him slowly reach out a finger and, gently, gently, roll the parcel over. A few seconds later, with the deliberation of the expert, Perrier pinned the parcel firmly to the plinth with the fingers of his left hand and took from his coat pocket a pair of wire-cutters. He did not squeeze the parcel, or move it, but merely anchored it and started to slide the lower jaw of the snips under the bright new string.

In the distance the noise of a detonation sounded. It was sharp, angry, menacing, more vicious than the sudden blare of a motor horn, less sonorous than thunder.

Aristide felt taut nerves leap inside him like stretched springs. He saw Perrier freeze, becoming motionless and at the same time more alive, in the way of an animal testing a scent on the breeze.

Thirty seconds passed. Then Perrier moved again. He squeezed the handles of his snips. The string parted.

A second detonation broke the stillness of the night. This time it was more distant and yet it was unmistakably of the same kind, from the same family, as the earlier sound.

Again Perrier became still. He waited for perhaps two seconds and then, with a gesture of decision, turned to walk away from the parcel. He did not seem to hurry. Aristide could see that the strings were cut and laid neatly aside, but that the wrappings of the parcel were undisturbed.

Perrier came to squat beside Aristide at the fountain. He did not speak.

Aristide waited until his companion had lit a cigarette before

asking the question that was urgent on his tongue. "Were they not explosives?"

"I think it very likely," Perrier said. "Only I preferred not to stay to make sure."

"Because of the other explosions?"

"Evidently," Perrier said. "Do you not see the pattern? For me, the first was suggestive, the second conclusive. These are protests, surely—against the referendum. Small, nearly harmless charges planted in public places where they cause loud noises, alarm the public and aggravate the police? With them goes the inference that larger and less harmless charges could be planted in more vital places. They have done it before, mon vieux—both the nationalists and the colons. It is, in a word, a form of public blackmail."

"So you mean to wait until this one explodes?" Aristide asked presently.

Perrier nodded. "They will have been timed to go off at the same moment; that, too, is in the pattern. It is only my good luck that the mechanism in the one we have here turned out to be slower than either of the others. It is upon chances like this that one continues to survive, and when one is warned as I have been this evening, one is not, believe me, so ungrateful as to ignore the warning."

"What damage will be done when the parcel explodes?" Aristide demanded.

Perrier gestured contemptuously with his hand. "Zero," he said. "A few chips off our marble friend over there maybe, a few windows broken. No more."

Aristide ran his tongue over his lips. "Perhaps," he said huskily, "perhaps I should go round to warn the residents."

"No," Perrier answered. "For one thing you would probably not have time to warn more than one or two. For another it would be liable to start a panic. There is no danger to people inside the buildings, I assure you."

Aristide scowled at the package, hating it bitterly. "Had it gone off while you were examining it, mon lieutenant, what would it have done to you?" he asked.

"It would have killed me," Perrier said casually. "Or perhaps merely blown off my hands and blinded me. It is difficult to forecast such a thing with precision."

"How would you have disarmed it, had you been able to continue?"

Perrier chuckled. "Are you thinking of taking up my trade?" he asked. "Be careful; it is underpaid and tends to cause indigestion."

Aristide grinned in the darkness. He liked Perrier. "I am sorry," he said. "I am very interested and it is hard not to be curious."

Perrier sucked gently at the wet end of his cigarette.

"From the weight and shape of the parcel," he said in a professional manner, "one would deduce that it contains four cartridges of high explosive—probably plastic because considerable quantities of this have recently been stolen from Army installations in Algeria.

"It will also contain a time fuse of the chemical type. These fuses are about the size and shape of a propelling-pencil, unless they are homemade when they tend to be bigger and less neatly finished. The time fuse will incorporate a striker and cap and will have a detonator at one end. At least the detonator, and probably the entire fuse will be buried in the explosive.

"To render the whole affair harmless one merely has to separate the fuse and detonator from the charges. This, needless to say, should be done with great care and delicacy, for inside the time fuse there will be a fine wire already half eaten away by the action of an acid, and shocks are liable to accelerate this process.

"That's about all. Have I made the matter clear? It is not a complicated business, generally, because explosive mechanisms decrease in reliability as their complexity increases—and all good saboteurs are aware of this principle."

Aristide said solemnly, "You make it sound very ordinary, mon lieutenant."

"I try," Perrier admitted. "I generally succeed. Mine is a profession which demands the businesslike approach."

Hatred of the parcel had grown in Aristide—grown to a degree that was making waiting and passivity nearly impossible.

"To hell with it!" he said suddenly. "Why does it not explode? It must be ten minutes since we heard the last detonation."

The sound of a third explosion reached them, answering Aristide's question not directly but, as it were, by echo and sotto voce, for it came from a long way off.

Perrier stirred. "Hell!" he said. "They must have been as busy as bees." He rose to his feet. "I am going to telephone headquarters in case something may have been found in a less harmless location. Wait here and watch, please."

"Yes," Aristide said. "All the gates are locked, by the way, except the one that we entered by."

Perrier nodded. "I shall not be long." He turned and went away.

A fourth explosion split the silence of the night, close, loud, and very shocking. In the seemingly deeper silence that followed Aristide realised that he had stopped breathing. When his breathing started again it was deep and stertorous. He clenched his fist and stared at it. He opened his hand and beat hard with the heel of it on the cool stone of the fountain basin.

Presently, trembling slightly, he stood up and walked forwards.

With a steadiness of the fingers that astonished him, Aristide parted the wrappings of the parcel. He was seized by a feeling of unreality. His brain was muttering things about death and mutilation, but somehow it seemed that he was able to erect a barrier of incomprehension between his brain on the one hand and his heart and belly on the other.

It seemed as though he had passed through a region of fear to a strange, normally inaccessible region of tranquillity characterised most strongly by its effect upon his sense of time—for he did not feel hurried; there was no panic urgency in him and his fingers knew that they had time enough to do what had to be done without haste and without fumbling.

The parcel's contents were exactly as Perrier had prophesied. There were four cartridges of a yellow substance resembling modelling clay. Three of them still wrapped in greaseproof paper and the fourth, stripped of its wrapping, cut longitudinally like a hot dog and wrapped round a device which resembled, at least in its dimensions, a propelling-pencil.

Aristide separated the wrapped cartridges from the unwrapped one, allowing the wrapped ones to fall heedlessly to the ground at his feet. The unwrapped cartridge he delicately prised apart, using his big, spatulate thumbs. He detached the pencil-like time mechanism from the explosive. At one end of it there was a copper tube which had been squeezed flat—in order to break an acid bottle, he realised—while the other culminated in a slim aluminium tube which he was able to recognise, from his wartime memories, as a detonator.

Once the time mechanism was free of the explosive he slowly straightened his legs and stood upright. Then he held the time pencil away from his face at arm's length and walked like a cat for ten paces. He stooped and laid the mechanism on the ground. He turned his back on it and walked away.

When he had gone three paces it exploded. He did not turn round, for there seemed to be absolutely no need . . .

Perrier was standing by the fountain. As Aristide came up he took the half-smoked cigarette from his lips and flicked it contemptuously into the fountain.

"You are a fool," he said icily.

"You are disobedient, insubordinate, and a bloody fool."

"Yes," Aristide said. "It seemed—it seemed that it had to be done. I have been on duty here for ten years and I expect I am a little foolish about the place. I am sorry if I caused you anxiety."

There was a silence. Perrier took out his cigarettes. He was breathing deeply and Aristide could see the muscles of his cheeks working. He waited, passive, humble, and deeply concerned.

Then Perrier sighed and his right eyebrow cocked sardonically. "Did you not cause yourself anxiety?" he asked.

Aristide shook his head. "It seemed so very easy."

Perrier scratched his head and, for once, inhaled deeply from his cigarette. It made him cough. When he had stopped coughing he smiled.

"They have found another one rather too close to the Russian Embassy," he said in a level voice. "I am instructed to go and deal with it. I must not delay, or it may go off before I arrive."

Aristide chuckled. He was immensely happy. He said, "Yes, mon lieutenant."

"Please collect up the remains of the charge and let me have them later," Perrier said. "They may give us a lead on the perpetrators."

"Yes, mon lieutenant."

They started walking slowly in the direction of the car. Presently Perrier asked, "Do you want this officially reported?"

Aristide shook his head. They reached the car.

"By doing as I did, I did not mean to criticise," Aristide said abruptly. "It was something that I felt the need to do, personally. For you to have done it would have been stupid and unprofessional—I know that."

"Yes," Perrier said. "I know." He got into the car and the driver started the engine. "You have my admiration," Perrier said. "Good night, mon gars."

"Good night, mon lieutenant."

They shook hands through the open car window. A second later the car moved and Aristide stood back to give the driver room to manœuvre. A distant explosion sounded, coming from the direction in which the Russian Embassy lay.

Aristide saluted, smiling. Perrier waved his hand. Then he was gone.

© Kem Bennett 1962

"Lady Chatterley has been scratched from all engagements for maidens at starting."

Racing news

MR SING my Heart's Delight

BY BRIAN FRIEL

ON the first day of every new year I made the forty-five-mile journey by train, mail-car, and foot across County Donegal to my granny's house which sat at the top of a cliff above the raging Atlantic at the very end of the parish of Mullaghduff.

This annual visit, lasting from January until the nights began to shorten some time in March, was made primarily for Granny's benefit: during those months, Grandfather went across to Scotland to earn enough money to tide them over the rest of the year. But it suited me admirably too: I missed school for three months, I got away from strict parents and bothersome brothers and sisters, all younger than I, and in Granny's house I was cock-of-the-walk and everything I did was right.

The house consisted of one room in which Granny and Grandfather lived and slept. It was a large room lit by a small window and a door which could be left open for the greater part of the day because it faced east and the winds usually blew from the west. There were three chairs, a table, a bed in the corner, a dresser, and an open hearth fire over which stretched the mantelpiece, the focal point of the room.

In such bare surroundings, that mantelpiece held a rich array. A china dog stood guard at each end and between them there was a shining silver alarm clock, two vases, a brass elf holding a cracked thermometer whose mercury had long since been spilt, a golden picture frame enclosing a coloured photograph of a racehorse, and the shells of three sea urchins, sitting on three matchboxes covered with red crêpe paper. Every year I went there, I had to have each of those pieces handed down to me for examination and appraisal and my pleasure in them made them even more precious to Granny.

She herself was a small, plump woman who must once have been petite and very pretty. She always dressed in black—boots, woollen stockings, overall—a dark, inelegant black, turning grey

with too much washing and too much exposure to the weather. But above the neck, she was a surprise of strong colour: white hair, sea blue eyes, and a quick, fresh face, tanned deep with sun. When something delighted her, she had a habit of wagging her head rapidly from side to side like a precocious child with ringlets, and although she was over sixty then she behaved like a woman half that age.

Indeed, when I felt tired or lazy and she would challenge me to race her to the byre or dare me to go beyond her along the rocks at low water, I used to tell her that she was " nothing but a giddy, feather-headed old woman," repeating what I had heard my mother say of her so often.

Even on the best day in summer, Mullaghduff is a desolate place. The land is rocky, barren, uneven, covered by a brown heather that never blooms, and hacked into a crazy jigsaw by hundreds of tiny rivulets no more than a foot wide which seemed to flow in as many different directions and yet cunningly avoided crossing one another.

Granny's house lay at the most inaccessible end of this vast waste, three miles from the nearest road. It was a strange place to make a home, but Grandfather was a dour, silent man, and he probably felt that, by marrying the girl of seventeen who had an infant daughter but no father to claim it, he had shown sufficient charity: the least she could do was accept the terms of his proposal. Or perhaps he was jealous of her vivacity and attractiveness and thought that the wide Atlantic behind her and a three-mile stretch of moor before her would be good deterrents to a roaming spirit.

Whatever his motives, he succeeded in cutting her off so completely from the world that at the time of her death, shortly after my thirteenth birthday, the longest journey she had ever made was to the town of Strabane, fifty-two miles away, and that journey she had made the month before her marriage to fix up legal documents in connection with her baby, my mother.

She and I had riotous times together. We laughed with one another and at one another. A constant source of fun was Granny's English. Gaelic was her first tongue and she never felt at ease in English which she shouted and spat out as if it were getting in her way. We used to sit up until midnight, chatting and gossiping, and then instead of going to bed, perhaps decide suddenly to feast ourselves on herring fried in butter or on sand-eels roasted on the red coals or on a wild duck that was for the next day's dinner.

Or we would huddle round the fire and I would read to her stories from my school reading book—she could neither read nor

write. She would listen avidly to these, her face keen with interest, not missing a word, making me go back over a paragraph which she did not fully understand or halting me with a question about some detail in the story.

"Were you in a bus ever? A real bus—for people?"

"Once."

"What was it like, what? Was it bad on the stomach, was it?"

Or after the reading, she herself would retell the story to me—"Just to see did I understand it right"—especially if it were a tale about the daring of the lighthouse-keeper's daughter or a cameo biography of someone like Madame Curie or Florence Nightingale. And then the greed for knowledge about the outside world would fall away as quickly from her and she would jump to her feet and say, "Christ, son, we near forgot!" She used the word without any suggestion of profanity and because, I believe now, she rarely heard the conversation of women of her own time. "If we run to the lower rocks, we'll see the Norwegian fishing-boats going round the point. Hurry, son, hurry! They're a sight on a good night. Hurry!"

Out there on the rump of Mullaghduff she had no ready-made entertainments to amuse me but she thought nothing of her own discomfort to make my stay with her more interesting. We often rose before dawn to see wild geese spearing through the icy air high above the ocean. Or we sat for hours at a stretch on the flat rocks below her house to get a glimpse of sharks encircling an oily patch that betrayed a shoal of mackerel and then attacking it. Or we waded knee-deep in water at the shallow strand and felt the terrible thrill of fluke wriggling beneath our bare feet, closed our eyes and plunged our hands down to lift them out.

I know now that all these little expeditions were thought up to amuse me but I am also certain that, once we had embarked on them, Granny enjoyed them every bit as much as I did.

"It's a calf I have under my foot and not a fluke at all!" she would squeal with nervous delight, her blue eyes radiant with joy. "Come here, son! Come here and steady the arm of me!"

Or if we were standing on top of the hump of ground behind her house to get a good view of a passing transatlantic liner, all sequins of lights, she would fill it for me with a passenger list of gay, carefree people: "Lords and ladies," she would say. "The men of them handsome and straight as heroes and the women of them in bright silks down to their toes and all of them laughing and dancing and drinking wine and singing. Sweet Christ, son, but they're a happy old cargo!"

There was a February gale blowing in from the sea the evening the packman battled his way up to us. I watched him through the

kitchen window, a shrub in the middle of the bog, only it was bending against the wind. Then it grew to a man and then a man with a cardboard case half as big as himself.

When he was a stone's throw from the door, I saw that he was Indian. In those days, packmen were fairly common in remote areas. They went from house to house with their packs or cases of clothes and socks and bed linens and tablecloths and gaudy knick-knacks, and if a customer had no money for the goods chosen the packmen were usually willing to settle for the value in poultry or fish. They had the name of being sharp dealers, dishonest even.

The sight of this packman put the fear of God in me because Mother had taught us to be wary of all packmen and I had never seen a man like this before in my life. I led Granny to the window and peeped out from behind her.

"Will he attack us?" I whimpered.

"If he does, he'll meet his match in this house!" she said bravely, and threw open the door. "Come in, lad," she roared into the storm. "Come in and rest yourself for no goat could have made the climb up here today but a fool like yourself."

He backed into the kitchen, dragging his huge case after him. He dropped into a chair at the door and his head fell back to a resting position against the wall. His breath came in quick, short gasps and he made no effort to speak, he was so exhausted.

I took a step closer to him to examine him. He was a young man, no more than twenty, with a smooth, hazel skin that was a tight fit for his face. The crown of his head was swathed in a snow-white turban, wound round like a bandage. His shoulders were narrow, his body puny, his trousers frayed and wet from the long grass, and his feet as small as my younger sister's.

Then I saw his hands. They were fine and delicate and the fingers tipped with pink nails as polished as fresh seaweed. On the third finger of his left hand was a ring. It was a gold ring, wrought in imitation of a snake which held between its mouth and tail a damson-coloured stone. As I watched it, the colour became vaporous, like smoke in a bottle, and seemed to writhe languidly in a coiling movement. Now it was purple, now rose, now black, now blood red, now blue, now the colour of sloes in the August sun.

I was still gazing at its miracles when the packman slid to his knees on the ground and began reciting in a low, droning voice, "I sell beau-ti-ful things, good lady; everything to adorn your beau-ti-ful home. What is it you buy? Leenens, silks, sheets, beau-ti-ful pictures for your walls, beau-ti-ful cardigans for the lady. What is it you buy?"

As he spoke, he opened his case and removed all its contents, painting the floor with yellows and greens and whites and blues. He did not offer any one item but displayed everything as if for his own gratification—and no wonder, for he owned all the riches of the earth.

"You buy, good lady? What is it you buy?" he intoned without interest, without enthusiasm, but by rote, because he was tired beyond caring. His eyes never left the ground and his hands spread the splashes of colour out and around him until he was an island in a lake of brightness.

For a moment, Granny said nothing. She was dazzled by the packman's wares and, at the same time, she was trying desperately not to miss whatever it was he was saying and his accent was difficult for her. When at last words came to her, they broke from her in a sort of cry.

"Aw, Christ, sweet Christ, look at them! Look at them! Aw, God, what is there like them things!" Then rapidly to me, "What is he saying, son, what? Tell me what it is he's saying." Then to the packman, "Mister, I don't speak English too good, mister. Aw, mister, but they're grand treasures, mister, grand."

She dropped to the floor beside him and stretched her hands out as if in benediction over the goods. Then her arms went gently down and the tips of her fingers brushed over the surfaces of the garments. She went silent with awe and her mouth opened. Only her eyes were quick with ecstasy.

"Try them on, good lady. Sample what I have to sell."

She turned to me to confirm that she had heard correctly.

"Put on the things you like," I said. "Go ahead."

She looked at the packman, searching his face to see was he in earnest, fearful in case he was not.

"I have no money, Mister Packman. No money."

As if she had not spoken, the packman went on rearranging his colours and did not look up. Only routine was carrying him through. "Try them on. They are beau-ti-ful. All."

She hesitated momentarily, poised over the limitless choice.

"Go on," I said impatiently. "Hurry up."

"Everything for the good lady and for her home," mumbled the packman to the ground. "Sample what I have to sell."

She swooped on them as if she were going to devour them. Her fingers found a scarlet blouse which she snatched up and held against her chest. She looked down at it, looked to us for approbation, held it under her chin and smoothed it out against her while her other hand went instinctively to her hair which she gathered back from her face. Then she was absolutely still, waiting for our verdict.

" Beau-ti-ful," mumbled the packman automatically.

" Beautiful," I said, anxious to have everything sampled and done with.

" Beautiful," echoed Granny, softly, slowly, as if she were using the word for the first time.

Then suddenly she was on her feet, towering above us and leaping around the kitchen floor in a wild mocking dance.

" Youse would have me as silly in the head as the two of youse are," she squealed. " Look at me! Look at me! Fit for a palace, I am, in all my grandeur!"

Then she cut loose altogether. She flung the blouse to the floor and seized a yellow mohair stole which she draped around her shoulders and paraded up and down the floor in time to her own singing. Then she tried on a green hat and then white gloves and then a blue cardigan and then a multicoloured apron, all the time singing or dancing or waving her arms, all the time shaking her head like mad, delighted, embarrassed, drunk with pleasure, completely carried away.

Before she had gone through half the garments, the years put an end to her antics and she flung herself exhausted on top of the bed and let herself go limp.

" Now, mister, you can take the bloody load away," she panted. " For I have no money to buy nothing."

Again the packman did not hear her but shuffled his goods with weary patience and said in his dreamy way, " This you like, good lady." He touched a pair of brass candlesticks. " Beau-ti-ful. Very cheap. Very, very cheap."

Granny waved her hands in dismissal. " No money, mister. No money."

" Or you like this, good lady, this beau-ti-ful picture of the Holy Divine Redeemer. Also very cheap to you, good lady."

She closed her eyes and shook her head and waited for her energy to return.

"A lovely thing this, kind lady." His hand happened on a tiny box covered with imitation leather. Inside lay half a dozen apostle spoons. " These I sell by large numbers. Everybody love them. I cannot get them enough," he said without conviction. " The box to you, good lady, for half price."

" Shut up! " she snapped with sudden venom, springing up to a sitting position on the bed and scattering the langour that had emanated from the dealer. " Shut up, packman! We are poor people here! We have nothing! Shut up! "

The packman's head sank lower to the ground and he began gathering his goods in to him. It was dark now and he fumbled with the catch on his case.

She regretted her outburst at once because she hopped off the bed and began building up the peat fire.

"You'll eat with us, packman; there'll be hunger on you. We can offer you . . ." She paused and swung round to me. "Son, we'll roast the grouse that was to be Sunday's dinner! That's what we'll do. Grouse and praties and butter and buttermilk and soda farls—a feast!" She turned to the packman. "Can your stomach hold a feast, packman?"

"Anything, good lady. Anything."

"A feast it'll be then," she pronounced. "A feast and bedamned to Sunday." She rolled up her sleeves and began setting the table. The packman closed his case and went to a corner where he merged with the dark.

"Tell me, packman," she called to him from her work, "what do they call you, what?"

"Singh," he said.

"What?"

"Singh," he repeated.

"Man, but that's a strange name. Sing. Sing," she said, feeling the sound on her tongue. "I'll tell you what I'll call you, packman," she went on, "I'll call you Mister Sing My Heart's Delight! That's what I'll call you—a good, big mouthful. Mister Sing My Heart's Delight!"

"Yes," he said submissively.

"Now, Mister Sing My Heart's Delight, let the sleep come over you for an hour and when I give you the call, there'll be a feast and a festival before your eyes. Close your eyes and sleep, you poor, battered man, you."

He closed his eyes obediently and within five minutes his head had fallen on his chest.

We ate by the light of an oil lamp, Granny at the bottom of the table, me in the middle, and the packman in the place of honour at the top. It must have been a month since he had a square meal because he bolted his food ravenously and did not lift his eyes until his plate was cleaned. Then he sat back in his seat and smiled at us for the first time. He looked boyish now that he was sated. "Thank you, good lady," he said. "A beau-ti-ful meal."

"You're welcome," she said. "May none of us ever want." She held the bone of the grouse's leg between her fingers and drew patterns on her plate, her head to one side. "Where do you come from, Mister Sing My Heart's Delight?" Her tone suggested she was beginning a series of questions.

"The Punjab," he said.

"And where might that be?"

"India, good lady."

"India," she repeated. "Tell me, is India a hot country, is it?"

"Very warm. Very warm and very poor."

"Very poor," she said quietly, adding the detail to the picture she was composing in her mind. "And the oranges and the bananas grow there on trees and there are all classes of fruit and flowers with all the colours of the rainbow in them?"

"Yes," he said simply, for he was remembering his own picture. "It is very beau-ti-ful, good lady. Very beau-ti-ful."

"And the women," Granny went on, "do they wear long silk frocks melting down to the ground? And the men, are the men dressed in claret velvet and black shoes with silver buckles?"

He spread his hands and smiled.

"And the women, strolling about in the sun under the orange trees and the sun taking lights out of their hair and the gallant men raising their feathered hats to them and stepping off the roads to let them pass . . . in the sun . . . in the Punjab . . . in the Garden of Eden . . ."

She was away from us as she spoke, leaving us in the draughty, flagged-floor kitchen, listening to the wind ripping up the ocean below us and trying the weaker parts of the thatched roof.

The packman's eyes were closed and his head nodded.

"The Garden of Eden," said Granny again. "Where the ground isn't treacherous with bits of streams and the land so rocky that even weeds won't settle in it. And you have God's sun in that Punjab place and there is singing and the playing of musical instruments and the children . . . aye, the children . . ."

The first drops of a shower came down the chimney and sizzled in the fire.

"Christ!" she said, springing to her feet. "What class of dottering fools of men am I talking to? Up you get, you clowns you, and let me get at the washing up."

The packman woke with a start and made for his case.

"And where are you going?" she shouted to him. "Man, a badger wouldn't face out on a night like this!"

He stopped in the middle of the floor.

"Well?" she said. "Don't look at me as if you expected a beating. You'll sleep here tonight. There—across the front of the fire. Like a cat," she ended off with a shout of laughter. The packman laughed too.

"Now, Mister Sing My Heart's Delight, get out of my road until me and my wee man here gets cleared up."

By the time we had the dishes finished and fresh peat spread before the fire for the morning it was bedtime. Granny and I slept together in the bed in the corner, a huge, iron bed whose side

was always warm from the hearth. She lay next to the wall and I on the outside. Now we retreated to the shadowy end of the room and undressed. Then, with a skip and a jump, we were in the bed together before the packman had time to be embarrassed.

Granny peeped across me. " Blow out the lamp, Mister Sing My Heart's Delight, and then place yourself on the floor there. You'll find a mat at the door if you want it."

" Good night, good lady," he said. " Very good lady."

" Good night, Mister Sing My Heart's Delight," she replied.

He got the mat and stretched himself out before the red and white embers. Outside, the rain lashed against the roof and, inside, the three of us were as cosy as pet hens.

It was a fine morning, a fresh, blustering day that kept the clouds moving past and dried the path that led from the house to the main road. The packman was young and bright and his case seemed lighter too because he swung it easily by his side as he stood at the door, nodding his head and smiling happily as Granny directed him towards the parishes where he would have the best chance to sell his wares.

"And now," she said in conclusion, " God's speed and may the road rise with you."

" To pay you I have no money, good lady," said the packman. "And my worthless goods I would not offer you because . . ."

" Off with you, man. Off with you. There'll be rain before dinnertime and you should have eight miles behind you by then." The packman still hesitated. He kept smiling and bowing and swinging his case as if he were a shy girl.

" Mister Sing My Heart's Delight, if you don't soon go it's here you'll be for dinner and you ate it last night! "

The packman put his case on the ground and looked at his left hand. Then, drawing off the ring with those long, delicate fingers of his, he held it forward towards her.

" For you," he said, in a very formal voice. " Please accept from me in . . . in grateful."

Even as it lay on his hand, the stone turned a dozen colours. Granny was embarrassed. It had been so long since she had been offered a present that she did not know how to accept it. She hung her head and muttered churlishly, " No. No. No," and backed away-from the gift.

" But please, good lady. Please," the packman insisted. " From a Punjab gentleman to a Donegal lady. A present. Please."

When she did not come forward to accept it, he moved towards her and caught her hand in his. He chose the third finger of the left hand and slipped the ring on it.

"Thank you, good lady," he said.

Then he lifted his case, bowed to us again, and turned towards the barren waste and the main road. The wind was behind him and carried him quickly away.

Neither of us moved until we had lost him behind the hillock at the bend of the road.

I turned to go round to the side of the house: it was time to let the hens out and milk the cow. But Granny did not move. She stood looking towards the road with her arm and hand still held as the packman had left them.

"Come on, Granny," I said irritably. "The cow will think we're dead."

She looked strangely at me and then away from me and out across the bogs and the road and up towards the mountains which almost surrounded her.

"Come on, Granny," I said, tugging at her overall. "Come on. Come on."

She allowed me to pull her; and as I led her towards the byre, I heard her saying to herself, "I'm thinking the rain will get him this side of Crolly Bridge and the claret breeches and the buckled shoes will be destroyed on him. Please God it will make a good day of it. Please God it will."

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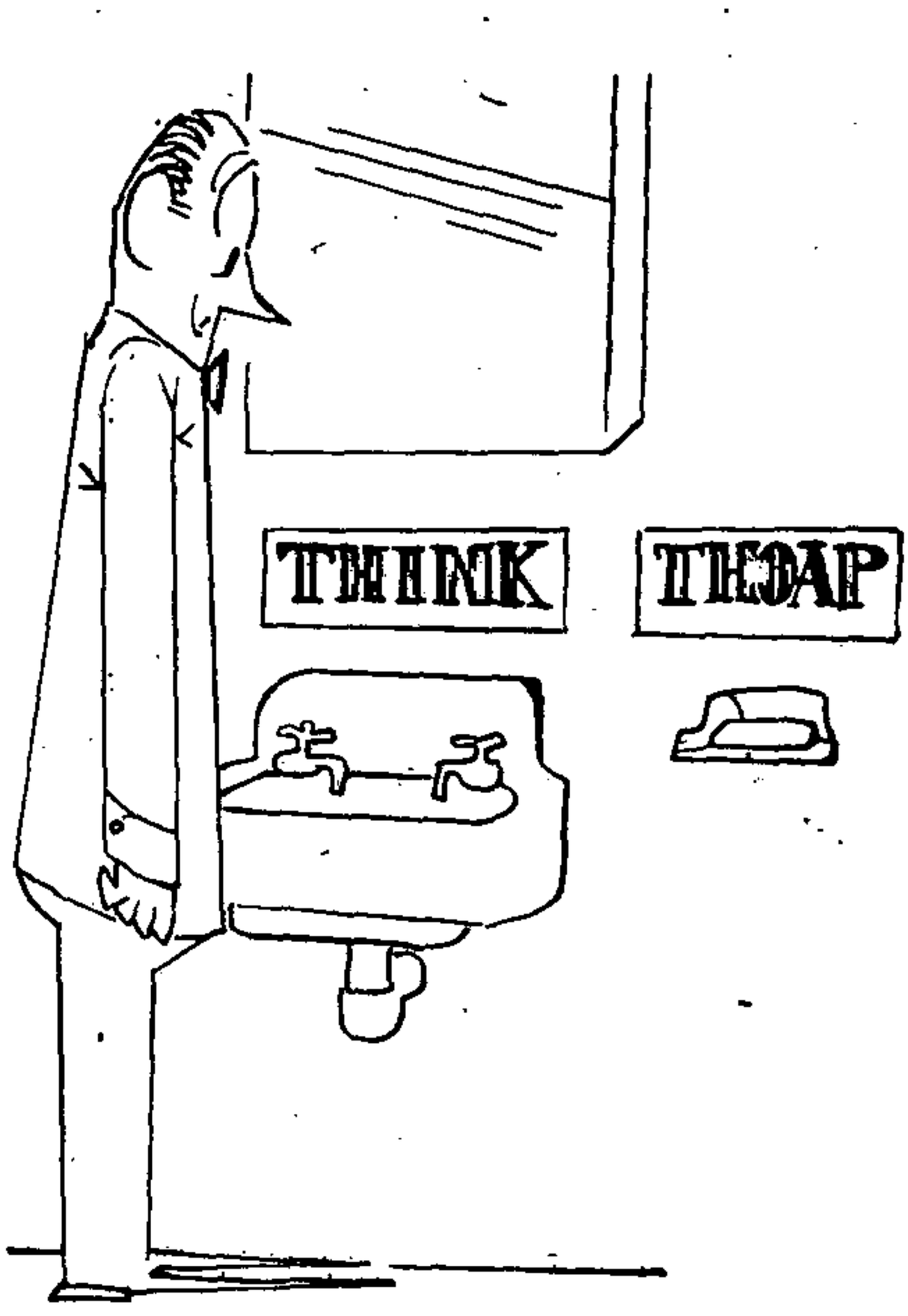

RAISE THE DUST

A thin trickle still seeped through
a hole in the ceiling

BY WALLACE CRAWFORD

THE house was the last in the row. It was the last not only topographically but also chronologically, for in the middle of World War II the other five houses in the terrace had been blown to smithereens by an enemy block-buster aimed at the adjacent airfield. With the departure of the R.A.F. nobody wanted to build there again, and the local builders said that this one had survived only because it was built on a stray piece of rock. The urban council cleaned up the area a bit, but the house remained lonely and looked almost lost. In the village pub, when they had downed one or two, they said it was haunted.

But Henry and Liz made it their first home, excused its deficiencies, and lavished on it the pride of proprietorship. In fact they only rented it. When Henry had got his job at the research station he proposed to Liz, and they started looking at once for somewhere to live. On his way to work one day Henry spotted the lonely house. He got somebody at the research station to pull strings with somebody at the Ministry, and somebody at the Ministry pulled strings with somebody on the local Council—and Henry got the house.

It is true that when Liz first saw it her heart descended a trifle from its customary elevation. She stared at the blank east wall, shored up with timbers, and wondered if it were possible to feel safe in such an edifice. The surveyor reassured her. She looked apprehensively at the gaps left by five demolished houses, fenced in, certainly, but full of mud when it rained and throwing up vast spirals of dust when the east wind blew, and wondered if she could possibly keep the place clean. Henry bought her a vacuum cleaner. And, of course, the rent was low, an overriding consideration with Liz, whose main object in life was to save enough money to buy their own house.

For two of them it was large, so they converted one of the rooms downstairs into a study for Henry, and one on the upper floor into a studio for Liz. She had a hobby—painting—which Henry said would one day be more than a hobby, although Liz

pooh-poohed this idea. But she did not demur at the studio. For one thing, from the upper floor she could see away over the fields, beyond the village, into the sunset. For another, she could see Henry coming home in the evening, a long way off on his old bike, and dash downstairs to put the kettle on.

One evening, absorbed in her canvas, she forgot to look out, and Henry quietly stowed his bike and crept up the staircase to come up behind her without sound.

"What," he demanded softly, "is that? Another cow?"

She started, then turned her head from the canvas and smiled. "It's the view across the craters," she replied. "Do you like it?"

"It's masterly," he said. "Or should I say, mistressly?"

She patted his hand indulgently. "Only you have the right to make fun of me," she remarked, and stood up. "I'd better get the dinner going. Fortunately, it's stew."

"The connection between good fortune and stew, I do not see," he said, putting his hands in his pockets.

"That's where you're an ignorant male creature," she replied.

He leaned over the canvas. "Now just a moment. A bit flat, that side, isn't it?"

"I've done the north, the south, and the west, so yesterday I wrapped myself up, erected the easel outside, and tried the east. I was just touching it up. It's interesting, don't you think?" She did not confess that the whole time she had been building up the canvas she had been possessed by a persistent uneasiness.

"I can see you've daubed it on a bit."

"It wasn't—it didn't come easily," she said.

"You've overdone it a trifle there." He pointed. "Or is that a cloud?"

"It's a cloud of dust," she said shortly. "From the fourth crater."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"When the wind rises, it is."

"Poor Liz! Of course, I never see much of it. It always seems to be damp at the weekend."

She laughed. "That's a fairly good excuse for keeping out of the garden."

They went downstairs, hand in hand. In the kitchen, tilting on his heels, he said, "Look, Liz, what say I go for one of those houses on the estate?"

Her face came up from the stew, and she pouted fiercely. "What? At the rent they're asking? Not likely! You wait till we've got the deposit we need for our own house."

He did not try that tack again. But he tried to keep an eye

on her, tried not to be absorbed by his all-absorbing job. He noticed that sometimes in the evening when the light began to fail, she would quietly abandon the studio and slip downstairs to sit behind him in the study. He did not attribute this entirely to the fascination of his company.

When winter arrived she seemed to abandon the studio altogether, and sat with him every night as he studied. He found this disconcerting, for he liked to work alone, but when he rose one evening intending a gentle remonstrance, she looked so forlorn, tucked up in the easy chair and dozing over a book, that his heart failed him. Instead, when after an instant she became aware of him and opened her eyes, he suggested they should take a quick walk down to the village and have a drink.

There was a pathetic gratitude in her eyes as she jumped from the chair to get her coat. Oh lord, he thought, what have I let her in for?

The walk down to the pub was brisk and invigorating. The air nipped, and their footsteps rang out with youthful eagerness as they swung along the country road. Above, the moon rose slyly and bathed them in sharp beams. Just before they entered the village, Liz stopped and turned.

"What are you looking at?" he asked.

"The house." His eyes followed hers, and he saw it standing up stark from the flat land.

"Why?"

To hide the disquiet which had prompted her to stop and look, she laughed. "You silly man, because it's our home."

He gave her a quick hug. A few minutes later they were in the warmth and light of the saloon bar. They had a few drinks, they got friendly with people. It struck Henry that this was the answer, this was what Liz needed. They began to make a habit of going down, usually at the weekend.

One Saturday one of the regulars, a sharp little woman with pale, opaque eyes, sat next to them.

"You're the couple from up by the airfield, aren't you?" she said, more by way of assertion than question.

They nodded, constrained to acknowledge their identity. Henry bought drinks.

"I wonder you can stick the place," she said.

"Why do you say that?" asked Liz unguardedly.

"Well, perhaps I shouldn't tell you, but . . ." The lady paused, tumbler in hand, as if decent reticence might get the better of her. "But they used to say that house was haunted."

"Interesting," commented Henry, with a cold smile. "What sort of ghost was it?"

"Well, you know how it is. Nobody ever actually *saw* anything." She tilted back her head and flung down the contents of the tumbler. She gasped. "Or heard anything."

"The only thing that haunts it now is Liz," said Henry, glancing at his wife. "And her vacuum cleaner, of course. That makes funny noises at times."

To his surprise, he saw Liz turn a deathly white. He touched her arm. "Are you feeling all right, dear?"

"Why not?" She managed a faint smile. "Don't be silly. Get me another drink."

"It's my turn," remarked the friendly lady cautiously. "Oh well, if you insist."

Henry gathered the glasses. "He's rather a gentleman, isn't he, dear?" she said, as he fought his way to the bar.

"That's why I married him," retorted Liz tartly.

"Naturally, dear," responded the lady placidly, directing a thin smile on her victim. "Well, as I say, nobody ever saw things or heard things. But—" she leaned forward, a groping hand on Liz's knee—"haven't you noticed a funny smell about the place? Not *exactly* like a graveyard, but a bit churchy, if you know what I mean?"

On the way home Liz was quiet, and Henry did not want to open a conversation in case it should take the wrong turn. He had learnt things about Liz. In a sense, he thought, she was still like a child, with a child's special perceptions. Through her dark glass she saw things that he, with all the knowledge and experience of mature manhood, failed to see. But he had to face the fact that if there was something about the house that was disturbing her, she would say nothing. She would say nothing because the rent was low and she wanted to save money for their own place.

The silence prolonged itself and he began to feel it was not good for her. It would be better if she got it off her chest.

"That damn woman has upset you?" he suggested quietly.

"No," she said.

"Are you sure?"

"If I wasn't sure I wouldn't say so." Her voice verged on irritation.

Nearly a fortnight later Henry came home one afternoon and found the doctor's car outside the house. Dr. Trewin had been at pains to make friends with them early on, and privately Henry regarded him as a better friend than doctor, for soon after their arrival Henry had sprained a wrist, and although he had found Trewin pleasant company the wrist still irritated him.

Trewin came to the front door as Henry put his key in the

lock. "Hullo, old man," he said. "Your wife's had a bit of an upset. Nothing serious, I think."

"What happened?" said Henry quickly.

"I don't exactly know. I was passing in the car, and I saw her sitting on the doorstep, apparently gasping for breath. I thought it might be asthma. Has she suffered that way?"

"Good lord, no."

"Well, come and have a look at her. She's in here." Trewin led the way into the study.

Liz stood up as they entered. Henry saw that her features were drawn tight with fatigue, that her lips were pale. He put his arms about her.

"Liz, dear," he coaxed, "what is it? Tell me."

She seemed to slip from his arms and fall to the easy chair. At first he thought she had fainted, then he saw she was weeping, her face in her hands. He turned to the doctor.

"She's overwrought," he said lamely.

"It's a way women have, sometimes," said the doctor, and his stout little form slid round Henry. He touched Liz on the shoulder.

"Now then, young woman. Tell us what happened. We can't help you till you do."

She raised her tearstained face. "I got out the vacuum cleaner," she said, "to clear away that pile of dust in the studio. I'd put it off. I'd kept putting it off. But I thought I was being silly. So I went up." She paused, the tears welling up again. "It was awful," she whispered. "Horrible." Her hands went over her face again.

The doctor looked at Henry. "Can you tell me what this is about?"

Henry spread his hands. "If I knew, I could." He knelt by Liz, took her hands from her face. "Now, tell me, Liz, please. What is it about this infernal cleaner?"

She stared at him. "It hasn't rained for ten days," she remarked seriously. "And it makes a dreadful noise, that cleaner."

"Mental stress?" queried the doctor, for his own benefit. "Delayed shock?"

He raised his eyes to the ceiling, apparently deep in thought. Then he looked down at Liz again and put a couple of questing fingers to her wrist.

Henry was not impressed. "Look, Liz," he said urgently, shaking her shoulders, "tell me what it's about."

"It's not the cleaner," she wailed. "It's the dust. The dust itself." Her face seemed to go rigid.

"Have you any brandy?" said the doctor.

Henry stood up. "What?" he said vaguely. "I don't understand this at all. I think I'll go up and have a look at that room."

"Before you do," said the doctor with the faintest irony, "I should be obliged if you would tell me where you keep the brandy. Just for your wife's sake."

Henry came to himself and found the brandy. The doctor poured a stiff dose and made Liz drink. In a few minutes she began to look more normal.

"We'd better go into this more thoroughly before I leave you," said the doctor.

"Yes," agreed Henry. "I think I'll just pop up and look at the studio."

"Be careful," said Liz, her eyes suddenly dry.

"Why?" said Henry, halting by the door. "What of, for heaven's sake?"

"I don't know. Quite honestly I don't know."

"Have you been sleeping well lately, my dear?" demanded Trewin, putting a casual thumb to her eyelids.

"No, I haven't. But I didn't want to tell Henry. It might all be fancy, and the rent here is so reasonable."

"But what is it that might all be fancy?" insisted Henry.

"Well, there's a noise in the loft. Like rats."

"We can catch rats. Anything else, Liz?"

She took a deep breath. "There's a hole in the ceiling of the studio, in the corner, and the dust keeps pouring down. There's a great heap there now, a mound of it. I thought I'd better have a go at it."

"Yes?" said Henry.

"I started the cleaner and it made a sort of screech as if something was catching. So I stopped it and had a look at it, but I couldn't find anything wrong. And while I was doing that the dust started pouring from the hole again, so that the pile in the corner was huge, almost—almost as big as a man."

"What then?" said the doctor, his eyes interested.

"I started the cleaner again and it made a frightful noise like a squealing pig, and the dust came up in a huge cloud, making me cough and choke. I ran out of the room and down the stairs and opened the front door. I—I was frightened. And that's all I remember, until the doctor dragged me in here."

Henry stuffed his hands in his pockets. "You mentioned the other day that the cleaner made a peculiar noise, didn't you?"

"I didn't," she whispered. "I couldn't have said that."

"Why not?"

"I've told you already. It isn't the cleaner that makes the noise. It's the dust."

"You're talking nonsense, Liz," said Henry with warmth, perhaps because usually this was the last accusation one could throw at her.

"Perhaps she isn't talking nonsense," murmured the doctor, and on his square, practical countenance there was an expression of childlike speculation.

Upstairs on the landing, Henry said, "Look at all this dust! Like the sands of the Sahara!"

With his polished toecap, Dr. Trewin poked at it gently. "Fine stuff," he remarked. "Filtered through the years. How many years?" He made an interrogative gesture. "It seems to lead that way?"

Henry nodded. "That's Liz's studio."

They went in and Henry switched on the light, for night was nearly on them. By the grimy window a half-finished canvas stood on the easel. The cherry plush sofa, on which Liz was supposed to relax, was now a dirty grey. Dust, soft and penetrative, almost slimy to the fingers, piled against the stacked canvases, invaded the crevices of the worn furniture and the folds of the tatty curtains. It even obscured the electric light bulb. A dank, depressive odour permeated the room.

"But damn it," exploded Henry, "I was up here a couple of weeks ago, and it was clean as a new pin."

The doctor stood regarding the mound of dust in the north-east corner of the room. "It hasn't rained for ten days," he rejoined cryptically. "Remember what your wife said?"

"Maybe," said Henry. "But it's so unlike Liz to let it get like this."

Trewin picked his way carefully over the floor. "And this will be the mound of dust she referred to. Quite a heap, isn't it?"

Henry stared at the sprawling mound. A thin trickle still seeped through the hole in the ceiling. The hole was a good deal larger than he had imagined.

"Curious shape," continued the doctor, nodding at the mound. "What does it remind you of?"

"I don't know," said Henry irritably. "A pile of dust, I suppose."

"It reminds me," said the doctor slowly, "of a man who has just received a blow in the stomach."

Henry's scalp prickled and his skin went cold as he saw that the doctor could be right. In the corner of the room a grey

man sagged, his body caved in, his head hanging, one hand clutched to his belly and the other dangling at his side.

"Just my fancy," said the doctor.

Henry shut his eyes, opened them, and saw only a grey pile of dust again. "You should keep that fancy under control," he said.

"As a matter of fact," said the other callously, as by tacit consent they moved for the door, "I'm not too sure it is fancy. I'm a practical man always, but sometimes, you know, it's practical to let the imagination work. I keep what they call an open mind. I'm keeping an open mind now, but I'm not quite sure what I'm letting in. There're the rats in the loft to think of."

On the landing, Henry stopped. "Look, Doctor, I don't quite like the idea of Liz staying in this place tonight."

"I was thinking the same thing. You can come down to my place, if you like, both of you. My wife and I are quite alone since the boys got married. It will make a nice change to have a couple of youngsters about the place."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Henry, grinning. "And thanks for the port in the storm. I'll tell Liz."

"Just a moment, young man. Don't rush off like that. Let me think." Standing in the thick dust on the dim landing, the doctor waved a restraining hand. "What I want to do is to make an experiment."

"All right, make an experiment. Come up tomorrow. You'll have the house to yourself."

"Tomorrow could be too late. And I don't fancy making this experiment alone."

"So you want to do it tonight and you want me to help you? All right. But what's the hurry?"

"It might rain tonight."

"Oh no, Doctor; you're not thinking in those terms."

"I am." The doctor's eye was a challenge.

Two hours later the car pulled up at the front door once more and Henry led the way into the study.

"It's time for a nightcap, really," he said, producing the brandy. "I don't suppose the dust has got into this stuff yet."

His tone was cheerful. A glass of wine and a good dinner at the doctor's house, and the sight of Liz trotting off to the bathroom in a voluminous dressing-gown belonging to Mrs. Trewin, had restored his normal frame of mind. It had also restored doubt. The whole thing, he thought, must be a sequence of coincidence. Rainless weather, tons of dust in the vicinity, a crumbling house; what would you? Liz had been lonely,

perhaps a trifle overwrought. Dust was dust, after all. Nasty, pervasive stuff, but hardly dangerous.

The doctor downed his brandy. "Dust to dust," he remarked, smacking his lips.

Henry laughed. "What does that mean?"

"What it says, probably. Tell me, just what do you do over at that research station of yours?"

"It's secret, you know, Doctor. I've signed a document."

"You've got radio-active material, I suppose?" queried the other, undeterred.

"Yes."

The doctor hesitated, eyeing his tumbler. "I don't think it's advisable for you to go on living in this house."

"Oh, come, Doctor. We can clear up the mess, and when we've had a drop of rain . . ."

"Come outside. I want to show you something."

Outside, the east wind was doing its worst.

"Look," said Trewin, his finger raised.

Henry looked. From where they stood, at the south-east corner of the house, it was possible to see quite clearly in the pale yet distinct glow which starlight throws on wide open spaces. To the east, the wind was whipping up successive spirals of dust from each crater and throwing them up in the mass, like a great wave, against the blank wall of the building. Watching, Henry thought of solid sea-walls cracking under the elemental violence of winter storms, of cliffs subsiding as the waves tore at their roots. Watching, he became cold. Even his heart was cold.

The doctor shivered. "Come on," he said. "Let's get inside again."

"You mean," said Henry, following him, "that sooner or later the wall will collapse."

"It's possible," said the doctor, closing the study door. "But what I really mean is that every cranny and crevice in that brickwork is rapidly being permeated with the stuff. And in the loft, under the eaves—well, you can imagine."

Henry nodded. "The rats in the loft?" he said.

"Could be. More likely shifting dust. However, let's get on with this experiment."

"But what is it?"

"I want to try out the vacuum cleaner."

"That bloody cleaner!" Henry's tone was vicious.

"Never you mind. It might settle the dust for us."

"All it's done so far is to raise it," responded Henry bitterly.

The cleaner was lying on the threshold of the studio, where

it had been left that afternoon. Henry plugged it in. "Let me work it," said Trewin. "But stand by. Just in case."

He advanced cautiously over the room, pointing the nozzle of the machine at the heap of dust in the corner. He switched on. There was a whir from the machine, then a low whine. Then, distinctly, a high-pitched scream.

"Quick," said the doctor, switching off the cleaner. "Get back. Back to the door." He pushed Henry to the landing, then turned.

"That scream?" whispered Henry.

"Almost human, wasn't it? Be quiet, and watch."

A sound was rising from the mound of dust, a sound which had in it all the elements of human anguish. It wailed, then dropped to the low continuous moan a wounded man might utter when he had lost the strength to scream. Then the dust stirred.

Under the dim electric bulb, the dust stirred: not as dust does, aimlessly, but with form and purpose. Something was rearing up in the corner of the room; the mound of dust became a pyramid, the apex of the pyramid became globular: a monstrous parturition was taking place before their eyes. The mass turmoiled, limbs differentiated. Against the wall there slumped a huge bear-like creature, shivering and moaning with the urge to identity and consciousness.

The doctor closed the door on it, swiftly and quietly. When he spoke, it was as if the dust had got into his voice. "Go to the bathroom," he said. "Get some water. Quickly."

Henry ran along the landing. The doctor, his ear to the panel of the door, heard the gush of water as the tap was released. He heard also, behind the closed door, a menacing growl of elemental fury. He turned his head, and Henry was at his side, the water in two enamel buckets.

"Give me one of those."

"What is it?" said Henry, handing over a bucket. "Behind there?"

"Spontaneous generation?" said the doctor loudly, but on a note of query, as if he were not answering the question but asking another.

Henry was silent. The whole house breathed with silence. Then, from the other side of the door, came a muffled thump.

"All right," whispered the doctor. "Very well." His hand on the doorknob, he still hesitated. Henry's eyes were shining with curiosity, with fearfulness.

"Let's go," he said. "Give it a push."

The doctor slowly turned the knob and gave the door a gentle

shove. The silence of the house gave way to the silence of horror.

There was á man, a huge grey man. From the other side of the studio he glowered at them with small, malevolent eyes. Grotesquely, only the eyes were distinct. The rest of his form was perfectly apparent, and yet transparent. Through the powerfully moulded torso one could see the peeling wall behind. Behind the bright, dangerous eyes one could see in the large cranium the incessant, insatiable activity of a million whirling molecules of shining dust. In the centre of each limb there was an intensification of density, as of bone formation.

He was upright; perfectly upright, as a human being should be. He was a hideous travesty, yet an approximation of humanity. Not only was he upright, but he had moved. This was implicit in his posture. Doctor and scientist both recognised it. And it was also implicit in his posture that he was about to move again.

They waited for it breathlessly, and the next step came, the second deliberately conscious action on the part of a new manifestation of creation. The great leg was raised, the great foot—clumsy and malformed, yet already betraying implications of the delicate structure of the human foot—was put forward. It fell to the floor with a thump, but it was another completed step. The creature raised its massive head and emitted a grunt of exultation. Triumph glared from its beady, evil eyes.

Rooted to the threshold of the room, horrified and yet fascinated, they had to watch. One could almost see the mind being made up. The whirring molecules danced with bitter, envious purpose. The other foot came up. It wavered; and when it came down there was a stagger, as of a child with its first steps. But the achievement remained intact. The power was there, and the purpose. There could be no doubt about it. The creature was walking towards them, and the glow of frightful, envious hatred in its eyes told them why.

Henry's mind, a battlefield of wonder and horror, refused to act, but the doctor had assimilated the situation. Coolly he leaned forward, and with a gesture almost negligent he tossed half the contents of his bucket across the floor. With a howl of agonised rage, the creature tottered back against the wall. Long black weals appeared on its frame, on its limbs. With grey hands the grey man scrabbled at his black wounds, moaning pitifully.

Henry found his voice. "What is it? What have you done?"

"Mud," said the doctor laconically. "I'm turning him back to mud." He turned his head, suddenly loquacious. "But so far as he's concerned, I'm inflicting horrible wounds on

him. It's like—it's like thrusting naked human flesh into fire."

"Oh, God!" whispered Henry.

"You are equating him with humanity. Just as I did, a moment ago. But I have a notion his very essence is inimical to humanity. If he survives, we cannot." The doctor paused, watching the violent, painful threshing in the corner of the dust-laden room. "All the same, I would like to—it must be possible to . . ."

There was a sudden, convulsive movement. The doctor raised his bucket again, then hesitated. The great form, quivering with agony, was stretching imploring arms to the ceiling. And from the hole in the corner of the ceiling there reached down another long grey arm, and the agonising creature beneath was drawn up swiftly and surely to the darkness above. As it disappeared, black gobbets of mud fell from its wounded limbs. Aloft there was a scuffling, a breathing full of intent, then the breathing silence of the house descended again upon the two watching men.

The doctor raised his bucket. "Interesting," he remarked. "Hardly credible."

He flung the rest of the water over the floor of the room. "Actually, beyond belief."

"Why did you do that?" said Henry.

"Keep them out of the room. In the loft."

"How many do you think are up there?"

"Who knows?" replied the doctor. "One can imagine them proliferating as you look at them, given the right conditions. But if we can only keep them up there, confined, and if I can only get someone up here quickly, we might be able to do some research work before—before—well, before what? I'm damned if I know."

He turned, the bucket swinging in his hand. "The trouble is, how the devil do we convince people?"

"There's two of us," said Henry quickly. "You and me. And Liz."

He suddenly realised just how much Liz, with her acute sensibilities, must have gone through these past weeks. Perhaps she had known months ago just what was up there.

"I know," responded Trewin. "But you're young. You'll be surprised, when you discover something really new, just how hard it is to make people believe. For all our jet planes and hydrogen bombs, we live in a tight little microcosm of ignorant comfort. Some things we just don't want to apprehend. They don't fit it."

"You think it's a form of spontaneous generation?"

"I can't think it's anything else. You saw it, and I saw it. At the moment I'm guessing, but my guess is that this east wind carries some activating agent to the dust. Probably from your research station."

"A free particle?"

"No, I rather suspect some new element, something we haven't yet encountered."

"I get your idea."

"I don't quite get it myself yet. But two hundred years ago electric power was a dream and a hundred years ago nuclear power was an idea." He strolled on to the landing and stared up at the trapdoor to the loft. "Now we have another dream, another idea. It's behind there, showing itself for the first time in human history. It's our duty to find out about it if we can. Have a cigarette." He proffered his case. "Do you stock a garden hose?"

"Yes," said Henry, striking a match.

The doctor took a deep draw on his cigarette. "Good. Now, what we want is water; not buckets of it, but thousands of gallons. Just as a measure of defence, you understand. We might bring them to bay."

"All right," said Henry, at the head of the stairs.

"Wait a moment. Bring the stepladders with you. And while you're down there, just ring up the county fire brigade, will you. I may need an extra supply of water."

"What do you think you're going to do?"

"I'm going up into that loft."

"You're not! Not without me!"

"Don't argue, dear boy. Just ring the fire brigade."

"But what shall I say to them?"

"Tell them you've got a fire, idiot."

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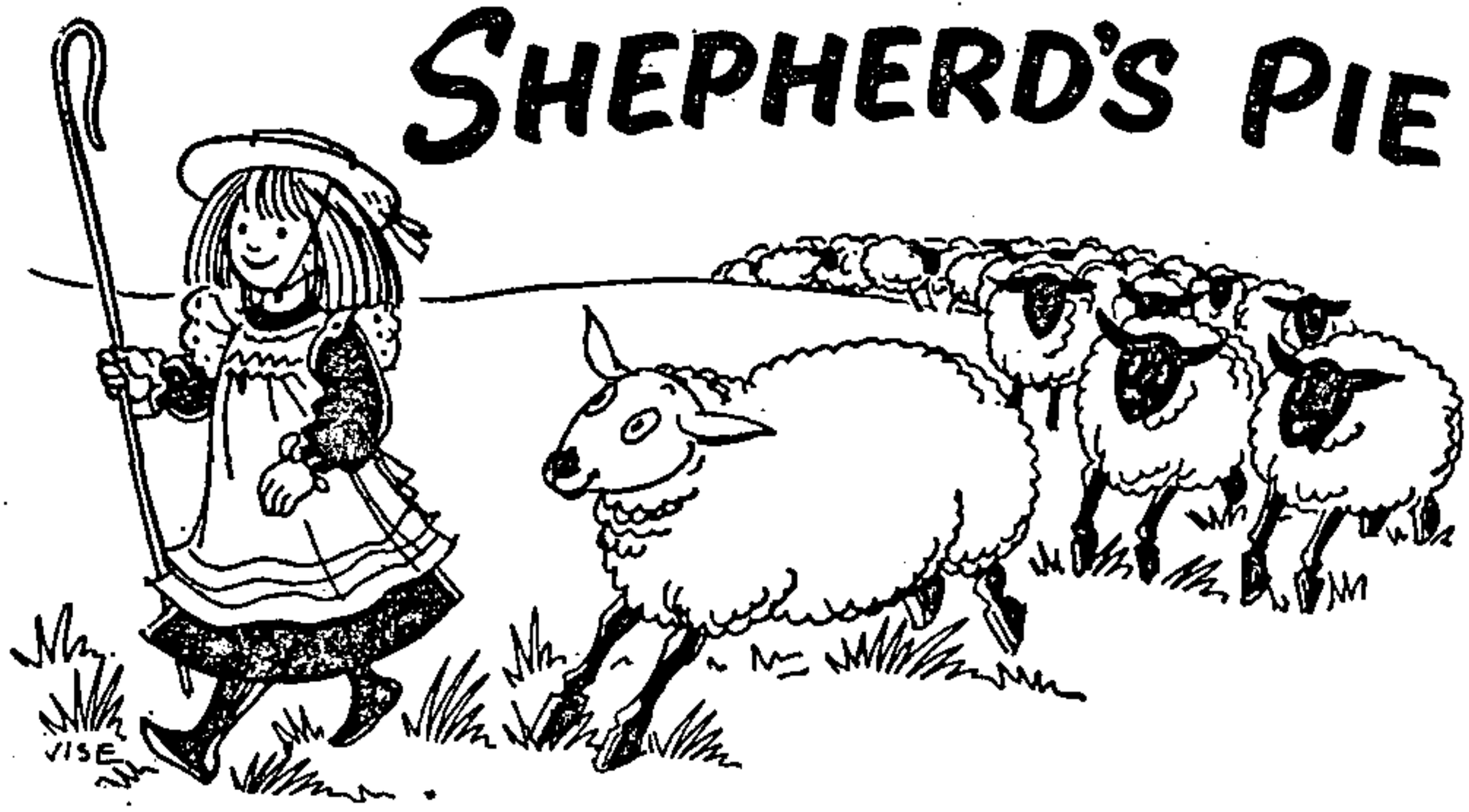
SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 136

Across. 1, *Cupboard love.* 9, 10, *Ancient Mariner.* 11, *Axle.* 12, *Rally.* 13, *Hans.* 16, *Customs.* 17, *Dynasty.* 18, *Sinking.* 21, *Cordial.* 23, *Espy.* 24, *Cream.* 25, *Clip.* 28, *Tripoli.* 29, *Trainer.* 30, *Freethinkers.*

Down. 1, *Cockles.* 2, *Poet.* 3, *Outlaws.* 4, *Rambled.* 5, *Lord.* 6, *Vandals.* 7, *Balance-sheets.* 8, *Crusty old port.* 14, *Robin.* 15, *Snare.* 19, *Nippier.* 20, *Garnish.* 21, *Chasten.* 22, *Islands.* 26, *Bone.* 27, *Bane.*

SHEPHERD'S PIE



The silly sheep is apt to live
A life without initiative;
A simple unreflecting glutton,
He changes grass to wool and mutton,
And so supplies the human need
For Irish stew and Harris Tweed.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG, *Sheep*

Sheep's Eye View

"What is it you want to buy?" the Sheep said at last, looking up for a moment from her knitting.

"I don't *quite* know yet," Alice said very gently. "I should like to look all round me first, if I might."

"You may look in front of you, and on both sides, if you like," said the Sheep; "But you ca'n't look *all* round you—unless you've got eyes at the back of your head."

LEWIS CARROLL, *Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice found there*

Mal de Mouton

When I was once in Baltimore,
A man came up to me and cried,
"Come, I have eighteen hundred sheep,
And we will sail on Tuesday's tide.

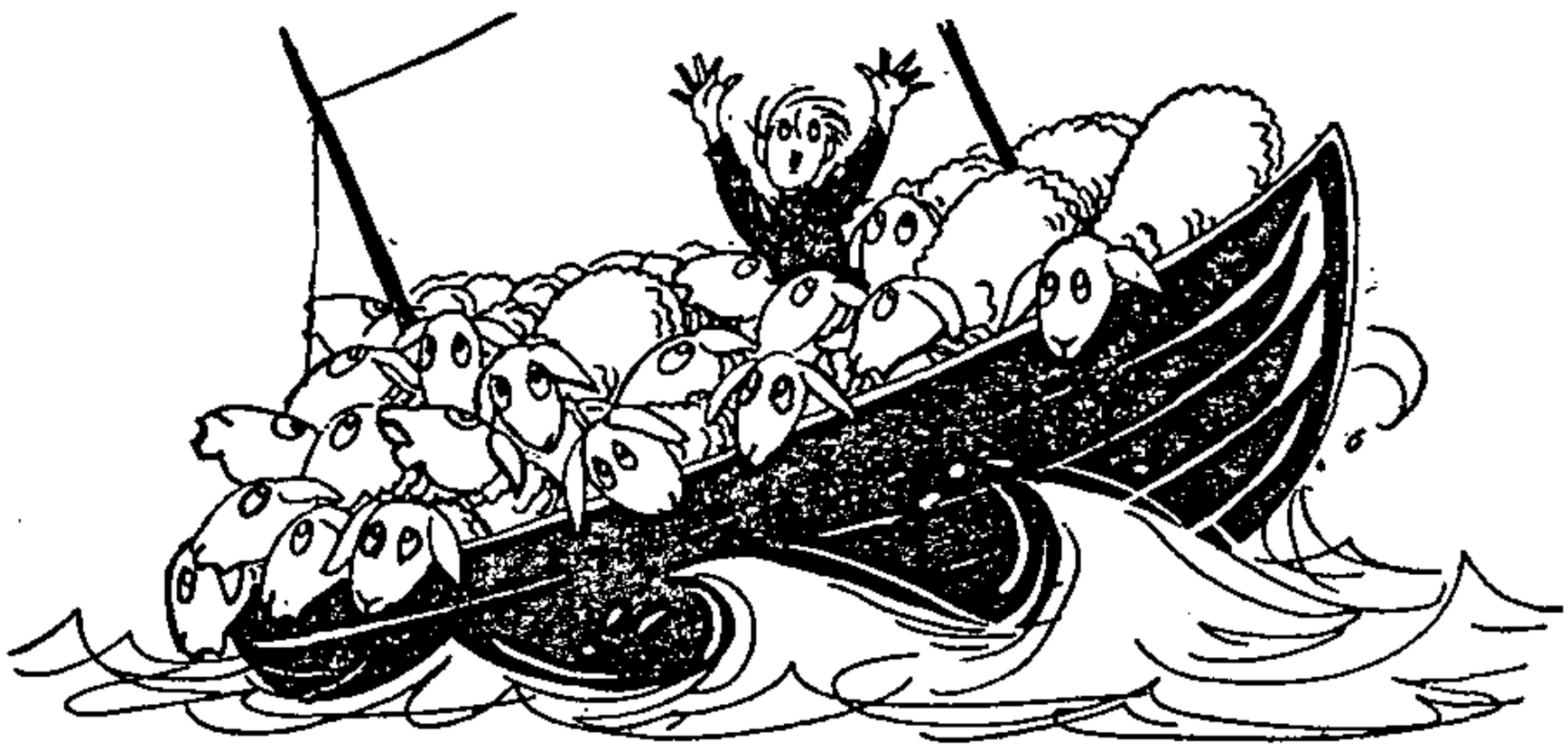
If you will sail with me, young man,
I'll pay you fifty shillings down;
These eighteen hundred sheep I take
From Baltimore to Glasgow town."

He paid me fifty shillings down,
I sailed with eighteen hundred sheep;
We soon had cleared the harbour's mouth,
We soon were in the salt sea deep.

The first night we were out at sea
Those sheep were quiet in their mind;
The second night they cried with fear—
They smelt no pastures in the wind.

They sniffed, poor things, for their green fields,
They cried so loud I could not sleep;
For fifty thousand shillings down
I would not sail again with sheep.

W. H. DAVIES, *Sheep*



Starlight

"Will you b lonely?"

"I'll have my sheep and my thoughts."

"Yes," said Thea, "and stars when the sheep are folded. The stars are good to be with too."

"Good to see and not be seen by," he said.

"How do you know they don't see you?" she asked shyly.

"One shepherd on a hill isn't much for the eye of a star . . . Sometimes there aren't any, and sometimes not more than one pricking the sky near the moon. But tonight, look! the sky's like a tree with full branches."

Thea looked up and said with a child's laugh, "Break me a branch!" . . .

"Here come your stars," said Young Gerard. Suddenly she was enveloped in a falling shower, white and heavenly . . . She looked up quickly and saw that he was standing beside her, shaking the tree above her head . . .

ELEANOR FARJEON, *Martin Pippin in the Apple-Orchard*

Ewe Lamb

She made a bed for him in the corner of one of the out-houses, fed him with milk from a baby's bottle . . . and petted him to the top of his bent. "Charlotte had a little lamb, his fleece was white as snow," said her father, teasing her goodnaturedly. "And everywhere that Charlotte went, that lamb was sure to go." "Very true," said Charlotte primly. "What shall we do with him when he grows up though?" asked Richard, anxious to forestall disappointment. "He's a most elegant lamb," answered Charlotte, elegant being one of her newest and favourite words, "and he has a black nose." She had an air of disposing of the whole question, but when the day of the June dipping arrived it was clear to her that Henry must have his share of hygiene. She therefore led him into the Severals, and out again; up the lane, down into the Wash, with the whole flock meekly following.

Shepherd Eames, a small ancient man largely hidden in a nimbus of greying black beard, rumbled with joy at sight of the procession; and at intervals throughout the day's operations he would pause to recall the joke again and to allow the rumble to begin, somewhere in the region of his boots, to rise and gather volume, to shake his small nimble frame and crease his rosy weatherbeaten face, and at last to find vent in a friendly roar. The process began with a simple rhetorical question and ended in laughter which everyone near him enjoyed even more than its occasion. "Did ye see the liddle gel, neighbours, bringing sheep along? Ay, she brung 'em along, sure enough!"

GERALD BULLETT, *The Bending Sickle*

Lady of my Delight

She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
She guards them from the steep.
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,
Dark valleys safe and deep.
Her dreams are innocent at night;
The chastest stars may peep.
She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.

ALICE MEYNELL, *The Shepherdess*

SAILOR WITH A HORN

He let the melody dance aloft—
the notes cascading down to earth

BY JACLAND MARMUR

THE chief had the duty the night it all began. He was only waiting for the liberty boat to take him aboard his ship. Sitting on one of those benches on Fleet Landing at the foot of San Diego's Broadway, he had an air of stolid calm. The westering light already washed the channel water; a flight of jets, still caught in upper brilliance, howled towards North Island from the sea. When their screaming died away the burble of the tidal flow returned, the murmur of enlisted men chattering about the liberty they'd made uptown.

These were familiar sounds, unnoticed by the chief bosun's mate who sat there, big hands on his knees, staring towards Tin Can Row where all the fleet destroyers lay in evening sunshine at their mooring buoys. Then he heard the voices from the bench not far away. He wasn't really listening, but their tone was different and his mind alerted. When he heard the clear contralto, sounding bell-like in that place, his large head slowly turned.

" Oh, Johnny," it was saying, low and touched with tenderness, " why do you always worry me so? "

The chief's eyes glittered, blue and coldly cynical. He'd seen so many scenes like this on all the Navy landings where the water meets the shore. Always some woman fouling up some man! This one, though, was a pretty fancy package. As she sat there with her head tipped back, he was acutely aware of the line of her throat, the outward curve of her breast. And her hair was red. Not flaming. Russet, maybe. When sunlight caught it, he was sure it would glisten with points of gold. No young chick either: touched by an aura of quiet maturity.

" What's to worry about? I'm a big boy now. You ought to know."

The chief looked over at the white-hat standing in front of her. God, he was young! He looked familiar, too. First-cruise

youngster. The chief could tell. Rust-headed; sullen twist on his youthful lips. Probably carrying a drink or two too many when he shouldn't have had even one. She had him fouled up good, all right. Real good. Imagine a grown, full-figured woman like her snatching a kid like that. That's how dames were. They always latched on to what was handy.

"But, Johnny," the low, clear voice was saying, pleading a little now, "it can happen to anyone. It will all work out. Please! Go back aboard your ship now. I'll—"

"Ship? That crumby bucket?" The kid's quick snort exploded. His head jerked towards the water to indicate whatever fleet destroyer it was he meant out there. "You call that loused-up can a ship? Got no more soul than a jackrabbit running in a field. And a ship without a soul just can't do nothing right. Here!" He thrust out to her the small black case he'd been carrying under his arm. "Take care of this. I've got no use for it. I'll see you next week, Cannie."

He turned and strode away. The redhead watched him walking from her. Then she bowed her head. The chief's eyes glittered, blue and cold.

"Cannie!" he barked, his deep voice easily crossing the intervening space. "What kinda crazy name is that?"

"It isn't, really." She said it thoughtlessly, at once. Evidently she had to explain it often. It was habit now. "When I was a little girl, my baby sister never could say Caroline. It always came out Cannie. That's why—"

She stopped abruptly, startled to realise she'd spoken. She looked quickly over at him, coming to her feet, turning away already. So he spat his judgment at her.

"You didn't have to rob the cradle, did you?"

She spun instantly back while he indolently drew himself erect. She took three haughty paces towards him. He saw her eyes were flecked with green and full of fury.

"So you think I'm his girlfriend, do you?"

"I don't think—I know."

"Oh, you do, do you!" Her voice was taut with anger, rage in her flaming eyes. "For your very special information, my name is Thomson. That's the boy's name, too. His father was my husband. He got killed at sea. Now you just—"

"Oh, come off it! You're not old enough to—"

"I was a child bride," she said with dry and acid scorn. "Is there anything else you'd like to know, Nosey?"

"Yeah." The chief's blue eyes, still cold and cynical, stared back at her. "Name's Chutley. Hank Chutley. Chief bosun's mate. *USS George Beeler.*" He stabbed his thumb back

towards the channel water, without turning. "That tin can there." His deep growl went on flatly, "I recognise the kid now. In my division. What's got him all mixed up? Don't tell me. Let me guess. Some woman. Always is. He found her snuggled up to someone else when he hit the beach for his liberty. He blew his top. You stop me if I'm wrong."

"All right. You aren't wrong. Now—"

"Do him good. He's lucky. Learning early. Won't hurt so much next time."

"You don't think much of women, do you?"

"How'd you guess?" The chief's lips curled. "What's that case he gave you? Wasted picnic lunch for the doll?"

"Just so you'll know," her cold voice snapped, "Johnny plays the horn. He—"

"He what!"

"The horn. The trumpet." The low contralto dripped with irony. "It's a musical instrument. Harry James and Satchmo play it, too. Good-bye!"

She wheeled away from him. For the first time Chutley grinned, calling after her, "Too bad I got the duty. We could have a cosy dinner at the Grill uptown. Man's got to warm his bones, you know."

She turned slowly, coming back to him, rage in her green-flecked eyes. Deliberately, her hand swept up. He felt the slap across his cheek and heard her taut voice say, "That's for your nastiness. Now if you don't mind, Nosey, I'll go on home and fix myself some salad and a chop."

"I'll bet you're a lousy cook."

"I'm so glad you'll never find out!"

And that's the way it all began. Hank Chutley watched her walking from him. Sure enough, when she cleared the overhead and sunlight struck her hair, it glistened with points of gold. He remained standing there a moment before he turned and went down the ramp to the landing float. It gave him time to recover. On the stern thwart of the *Beeler*'s whaleboat, as the coxswain backed her out, his hard blue eyes went darting over the chattering crowd. Kid wasn't aboard. It added up. That's how it always was. The chief gave a soft and scornful grunt.

He had the duty that night. It was the best time of all for a man like Chutley: with the messenger lolling in the shadows and the duty officer in the wardroom, the chief had the *Beeler*'s quarterdeck to himself. Long glass tucked beneath his arm, standing quietly near the gangway, he watched how night washed gently over San Diego towards the water, how the city's lights

began to wink and glitter. He could savour all the sounds and smells now while beyond the foreshore over there the city hummed, a jungle of excitement and unrest. The land, somehow, was always in a fever.

Not where Chutley was. This was his refuge and his balm. This place was orderly. It had a singleness of purpose, clear and unconfused. This was the time to let it seep into the marrow of his bones, to hear tidewater gurgling overside, the creak of mooring-lines; to feel the thin vibration of leashed power underfoot; to smell the old familiar smells of oil and paint.

The chief's eyes blinked. He moved over to the log desk where the faint light caught his craggy cheek. He stood calmly in the passageway, staring at the bulkhead opposite. There was a glass case bolted there. It held a polished trumpet secured by clamps of brass, a lettered card beneath. But Chutley didn't need to read the explanation. He had been in *USS George Beeler* when the thing had happened, and he'd known the lad who'd played it. *Beeler* was a smart ship then, taut as a fiddle-string, the best of Destroyer Squadron Ten.

Was it the horn that did it? Chutley still could hear it wailing out there off the bleak Korean coast. When Hungnam burnt, when the jets went screaming overhead and the tortured land exploded—suddenly its sound would reach you. Music at the gates of hell!

But it brought comfort to the ones who heard it. It stirred hopeful memory. Those days there wasn't anything the *Beeler* couldn't do, and all her people knew it. But not ever since. That kid was in the Number Two mount, hotshell man on the starboard five-inch gun, the *Beeler* on an independent mission of bombardment south of Yonte Cape when the shoreside battery opened fire. The ship took a shell burst, direct hit. Four wounded. Two men killed. That kid was one of them. Chutley, leading the damage control party, brought him out. They never heard the kid's hot trumpet licks again.

It was the commanding officer, writing to the youngster's family, who got permission to keep the trumpet in the ship. That's the reason it was there, clamped to the quarterdeck bulkhead. That skipper understood it was the horn—and the kid who played it—that gave the ship her spirit, kept her whole. He knew that without it she would be like any other fleet destroyer: her unique identity gone.

And Chutley, understanding it for certain too and staring at the trumpet now, kept wondering if she could ever capture it again. He knew her need as well as anyone. Another sailor with a horn, if he could blow the way that other youngster had, might

be the ship's salvation. And the redhead said this kid called Johnny Thomson played a trumpet! Was there hope there? Did such magic ever happen twice?

Chutley frowned, remembering the pride the *Beeler*'s crew used to have, the ship's taut smartness and élan. She didn't have it any more. The chief could tell. Even Johnny Thomson could, that first-cruise youngster on the beach calling his ship a crumby bucket, telling the redhead the *Beeler* had no soul, telling her a ship without a soul could never do anything right.

Soul? To a man like Chutley that was romantic nonsense. A ship didn't have a soul. A ship was fashioned of metal and human skill, that's all. The rest, if anything, came from the people who served—and sometimes died—in her. Blast that rusty-headed youngster anyhow! The redhead, too. That's what Chutley thought, hearing the drum of a water taxi close aboard. Something told him it was headed for the *Beeler*, and he turned with slowness for the rail. He was right. The youngster came climbing up the ladder, hastily saluting the ensign and the quarterdeck from the platform before he stepped aboard.

"Real nice of you to join us, Thomson." The chief's blue eyes snapped coldly. "You're overdue."

"Yeah, Chief, I know." The kid was weaving a little. "Lousy dame! Out with that Mesa cowboy! Now she's bawling and telling me she's sorry. Lousy—"

"I'm bleeding for you. They're always sorry. You're on report."

"Yeah, Chief, I know."

He moved towards the passageway. Chutley watched him, craggy face in a twisted frown. Then suddenly he barked out, "Thomson!" When Johnny turned, he growled, "I hear you play a horn. I'll bet you ain't much good."

The kid came back. He stopped in front of that bulkhead case. For a moment he looked at the chief in anger, then over at the trumpet behind the glass. Without a word he unsnapped the door and pulled the horn from its clamps. Then he stood there, fiddling with it, fingers testing the piston valves. He took off the cup mouthpiece, blew through it, pressed it back. Then slowly he put the trumpet to his lips. The minute he did, something happened in his eyes. They weren't sullen any more: they took on a faraway look.

He blew a tentative scale at the deck, lowered the trumpet to examine it, lifted it to his mouth again. This time he played the opening bars of *Mack the Knife*. He let the haunting melody hang in air and went back right away to the opening phrase.

Then all at once he raised that horn to the starry sky. With his head tipped back, he let a last note tremble in the night.

Then he went into orbit with that horn, sending improvised melody soaring up to heaven where the constellations glowed. He let it dance aloft there for a while in ecstasy before he tipped the notes to a minor key and brought them all cascading down to earth and water where man's only home can be. They were full of sadness now, mourning for a broken dream. Then, without warning, he broke it all off and savagely slapped the horn back in its clamps.

"Nuts!" he said. "Makes me always talk too much. Damn horn!"

He strode off instantly, disappearing in the midship passageway. The chief just stood there, motionless. Maybe some instinct told him he had heard a man reveal himself. Some others must have heard it, too. The duty messenger loomed in the shadows. Voices sounded from the afterdeck.

"Wasn't he out there? Man, he was way, way out!"

"That's Johnny Thomson. Johnny the Tomcat now, for sure! Did you hear that tomcat blow?"

So early the following morning, with the executive officer's permission, Hank Chutley stood in the skipper's cabin, cap in hand, while Commander Hartley changed from his shoreside clothes before taking the *Beeler* out to sea for an anti-submarine exercise with other First Fleet units.

"Well, Chief," the skipper said, "what now?"

"Fella in my division, sir. Name of Thomson. Overleave. He'll be standing mast."

"Blast it! That makes seven. How can I make these people understand I—" The skipper stopped abruptly. He hadn't meant to betray his exasperated worry about his new command. He sat down on his bunk and sighed, bending over to lace one shoe. You couldn't fool an oldtime Navy chief like Chutley, anyhow. Chutley knew. With his head still bent, Commander Hartley growled, "I intend to throw the book at them. Your Thomson, too. That what you want?"

"No, sir. Johnny's a good kid. Just all mixed up. Some woman. You know. Always is." The chief's usual raspy tone was surprisingly gentle. It startled the skipper. It made him look up. The chief was fidgeting with his cap. "What I thought, sir . . . Well, I mean, if you could sort of ease him off with—"

"Now look, Chief, you ought to know better!" the skipper snapped. "I mean to bring this ship's morale back where it ought to be. Maybe that's just what's been the trouble here."

He bent over quickly in dismissal. "There will be no favourites!"

Chutley said nothing for a moment, and he didn't go away. He just murmured quietly, "He plays the horn."

Commander Hartley's head rose slowly. They considered each other in silence like that—till the skipper spoke one word. "Good?" he asked.

"Real good."

Then neither spoke. Probably the skipper thought as little of all that romantic nonsense about ships' souls as Chutley did. But he knew when he had a smart, taut ship—and when he hadn't. The difference was a shadow line, an intangible thing that touched men's heart and spirit—or didn't. No commanding officer could supply it. You couldn't read it out of a book. Skippers came and skippers went; enlisted men were there for ever. They alone could weld a fleet destroyer into a single, compact unit of purpose and brotherhood.

When they did, there wasn't anything that tin can couldn't do afloat, and her crew walked with pride on the beach whenever they went ashore. The *Beeler* had that once. It was in her tradition. Maybe it was just because a youngster with a trumpet in his hand and a little of heaven's glory in his heart held the gift to speak for all of them. Maybe that's why Commander Hartley, who understood the value of an oldtime chief, sat on his bunk with his head tipped up, looking straight into Chutley's still, blue eyes.

Then he said with sudden brusqueness, "All right, Chief. Thanks for telling me."

"Yes, sir."

That was all. And that's why Johnny the Tomcat missed his liberty the following week.

Hank Chutley went ashore, though. He came up the ramp at Fleet Landing, heading for the selfsame bench. The redhead was there, all right. He strolled up to her with a careless air.

"Hi, Cannie," he said. "The boyfriend asked me to tell you not to wait. He's stuck with the duty on board." He grinned. "Next week, too."

She looked up. Her eyes, he saw again, were flecked with points of fiery green. She was telling him coldly, "Just what I'd expect. Your doing, no doubt. I suppose you're very proud."

"He overstayed his leave," the chief said flatly. "Had a few too many besides. Fool kid! He got off lightly."

"I'll bet!" She stood up, angrily facing him. "If you think for a single minute that keeping Johnny on board will let you make any time with me, you've made a sad mistake." She half

turned away. "Just tell him from me that his Julie Jones is crying her eyes out. I mean, if you're sober enough to remember when you get back. Now go on uptown and get drunk. That's what you mean to do, isn't it?"

"I hate the lousy stuff!" The sudden savagery in his voice arrested her. She saw his blue eyes staring past her, hard and cold. "The ones who don't know what it's for can make its good part into chains of misery." He wasn't grinning now, his big unlovely face contorted, locked on bitter memory. "Go on!" his hoarse voice barked. "Shove off!"

She didn't stir. Without really knowing it, she murmured, "I thought it was women you despised."

"Yeah."

"You were married, Chutley, weren't you?"

"Yeah. How'd you guess?" He had that frozen, cynical tone again. This wasn't what he'd come to tell her. Now he had to. So he did. "Sweet woman, she was. Real sweet. Like Johnny's little Julie, I suppose. She cried so easy, too. They don't ever grow up, do they? They're just always sorry. Afterwards! Part of the hangover, maybe. Till the last time. Up in Frisco. Driving like hell on Bayshore Freeway, higher than a kite. Had our little girl with her. Sally was only four. Wrapped the car round a pylon. I guess she was sorry that time, too. It was too late, though. Both of them were dead."

His flat, cold voice broke off. He was breathing in anguished gasps. She kept watching him in wide-eyed fascination, washed by his horror, wanting to reach him with some word of comfort. Before she could, his voice rasped on, snarling at her.

"Now get out of here! Shove off! I don't want anyone fouling me up again! I get by better all alone. I don't need anyone!"

He spat it out and spun away, striding from her towards the place where all the last of the sunlight splashed. Before he reached it, though, her low voice, clear and bell-like, lashed him.

"You're a liar!" He looked back across his shoulder, truculent, enraged. "You're such a tough old Navy sailor, aren't you?" She was speaking without anger, almost gently. "You're a real old hardcase chief. You don't need anyone at all. Oh no! Well, let me tell you something, Chutley, just in case you never knew. You're a child. You're a hurt little boy who needs somebody's love so bad you want to cry. Only you can't. You don't know how any more. So instead, you sound off like a . . ."

She stopped. There was no use saying any more. He wasn't there. He was walking from her towards Harbour Drive with his rolling tin-can gait. She watched him for a moment longer, till his big shape merged with a cluster of ensigns and junior grade

officers at the taxi stand. When she couldn't see him any more, she sighed.

So that's the way it went. He saw her whenever he was on leave. She was always at that bench. And they always wound up quarrelling. Maybe because he never told her what he really meant to. He had simply forgotten how. The worst of it was, things weren't any better in his ship. The *Beeler* was just as sloppy as before, her gunnery dreadful, her signal bridge a mess. No matter how neatly the skipper put her alongside, her people always missed the moor and he'd have to back off and try again, swallowing his wrath while they recoiled heaving-lines, almost hearing the jeers from the rest of the ships in Tin Can Row.

He gave the chief some pretty nasty looks, to say nothing of a ticking-off or two. Because Johnny Thomson never played the horn again. The trumpet stayed clamped tightly where it was. Her people forgot all about it. You can't force a man to make music when it isn't in his heart. The kid was still upset about pretty Julie Jones.

Then *USS George Beeler*, in the normal course of events, was scheduled with Desron Ten for her tour of Formosa duty with Seventh Fleet. The skipper was less than elated. He was deeply worried about his command. Her people had no bounce, and no matter how many books and Navy regulations about leadership he read, neither he nor his executive seemed able to find the cure. Commander Hartley, of course, had never heard what Johnny Thomson thought. The kid had put it simply: the ship had lost her soul. Probably the skipper would have grimaced wryly, hearing that, though in the end he might have agreed, probing himself without mercy to uncover the ultimate fault.

But how do you give a ship a soul? How do you endow two thousand tons and more of steel and steam and electronic gear with so subtle a thing, a thing so miraculous? It can only come, if ever it does, from the hearts of men who, in rare moments of glory, are touched with something divine. The skipper's instinct knew that: he was a dedicated man. He could only hope that out there on a foreign station, somehow the thing might happen.

Something happened, all right, though not in a place or manner foreseen. The *Beeler* was in a Force screen westward of San Nicolas Basin still some time before she was due to sail for Pearl, a bombardment exercise scheduled for dawn against the cliffs of San Clemente. She never got there. The commodore peeled her off for an independent mission. Maybe he thought the gunnery would do her no good anyhow. Maybe that's why he picked the *Beeler*, detaching her and sending her steaming into the

night to investigate the reported presence of an unidentified submarine in Area TX42. That's where a moment of truth was awaiting her and her crew, the way it waits somewhere, sometime, for everyone.

The *Beeler* steamed her search pattern by the book, watches set in Condition Two, surface radar circling, sonar probing the deep. No contact. A drill, her people were sure, just another crumby drill. Through the middle watch the north-west wind kept making, chopping a noisy cross sea at her in inky darkness, whimpering past the signal halyards.

Commander Hartley hauled her seawards again on the outward leg of his area, prowling his dim-lit Combat Information Centre where the radar scopes glowed green, where the shadowy shapes kept murmuring. No contact.

He climbed wearily up the ladder, through the pilot house, out to the weather wing of his bridge. There, against the splinter shield where the wind kept pouring past, he waited for the coming day.

The ship was rocking on the dark flood when, astern of her, first dawnlight grew, faintly showing the glitter of a sea peak now and then, giving shadowy substance to her gun mounts and her snouting five-inch rifles. That's when she found what she was looking for. It never showed on the radar scope. Sonar made no contact. And it wasn't a submarine at all.

Johnny Thomson was the man who saw it first. He was on the foredeck, leaning on the life-rail where he had no business to be. In the eerie light a dark cone was drifting down on the ship, bobbing and disappearing. The kid didn't think it was real. He probably didn't actually even see it in that first moment, still brooding, no doubt, about his Julie. It just impinged itself on his consciousness. Then all of a sudden its meaning and its terror slashed across his mind. He wheeled instantly, one arm flung out.

"Floating mine!" he screamed to the bridge. "Close aboard! Starboard bow!"

The rest seemed to happen like lightning. The bridge watch rushed to the wing, peering over and forward.

Only the skipper just stiffened where he was. Almost in the same moment his skill, his training, and his instinct took him in charge.

"All back emergency full!" he barked. "Right full rudder!"

"Engine-room answers all back emergency full. Rudder is full right, sir."

The skipper had waited till he heard that response from the pilot house, till the engine telegraphs tinkled. Only then did he

spin round to peer forward, feeling enormous power, the throbbing, shuddering vibration underfoot. He spotted the black thing in the water at once, right ahead, wondering why the devil no lookout had seen it. His eyes went narrow. Something suddenly clicked in his mind. But the ship was heeling far over, her reversing wake boiling furiously forward as she made her curving turn. And below him on the foredeck, taken by surprise and thrown off balance by the ship's steep heel, Johnny Thomson went hurtling sideways over the rail. He struck the water without a sound, his cry unheard. Hank Chutley was the only one who saw him. He started racing forward, peeling his jersey as he came.

"Man overboard!" his harsh voice roared. "Starboard side!"

Without any pause, the chief went over head first in a clean and shallow dive. He came up gasping, his breath a labour, not knowing why, not realising he had struck his side beneath the water against the half-submerged dark cone. But he knew the kid was floating over there, face down. When Chutley reached him, he hauled his head up by the hair, treading water, slapping the youngster hard across the face.

"Come out of it, now!" Chutley barked. The youngster began to thrash until he felt the chief's hard palm across his cheek again. "Fool kid! I told you a hundred times a life-rail ain't for leaning! You got no better sense?"

Johnny began to splutter and cough. He was quiet in the water, though. He would be all right. That's all the chief could really remember about it after that till they both were hauled on board. He didn't remember that too clearly, either. But he knew at last he was in the *Beeler*'s battle dressing-station, draped in a warm blanket, the hospital doctor muttering and fussing with him. Johnny Thomson stood watching, an adhesive patch at his temple, a worried look in his youthful eyes. Then the skipper came in.

"Chief's got a couple of cracked ribs, Captain, I think," the doctor said, pulling the chest tape taut. "Ought to get it X-rayed."

Commander Hartley grunted. "That was a stupid thing to do, Chief, both propellers turning."

"Kid don't swim so good," Hank Chutley growled. "And I saw him bang his head on that mine, sir. He was out in the water, stone cold." He winced with sudden pain. "Take it easy, Doc!" He looked up at the skipper. "Ship was backing anyhow, sir." His blue eyes held steady on his captain's face. "Besides, I knew you had the con."

Commander Hartley nodded, understanding his chief was

giving him his complete professional confidence. Then, amazingly, his eyes began to twinkle. " It isn't a mine at all, or we'd all be in kingdom come. It happens to be a missile nose cone. A very important one. I'm happy we were the ones to find it. We'll have it safely lashed on the afterdeck very soon."

The skipper looked over towards Johnny Thomson. He was feeling fine. " Son," he said, " I never thought I'd give a man a commendation for taking a header into the drink. I guess you deserve it, though, for spotting that thing when none of the bridge watch did. Including myself." He turned away. Before he stepped out to the passageway, he looked back over his shoulder, calling gravely to the kid, " Son, you don't really play the horn, do you? I think the chief was pulling my leg."

He was gone. The doctor finished his taping, taking sly pleasure each time the big chief winced. Johnny just stood there, blinking.

" Chief," he blurted at last, " I've got to say thank you for—"

" Yeah. Sure. Now let's get out on deck and give the men a hand."

" But, Chief, I mean it! " The kid was deadly serious. His heart was in it. "And I've heard from Julie again. She says she—"

" Now don't get all worked up again about a dame! "

The chief was on his feet, brushing past the kid, angry at being confined while someone else on deck attended to his work. Sure enough, they were having trouble when he got there. What fresh-caught ensign could properly handle a job like that? It wanted a tough old chief. He began to bark at his clumsy crowd. They couldn't get out of each other's way. Wouldn't they ever learn? He remembered when the *Beeler* was taut and smart as a whip and all her people proud.

He was snarling about it when all of a sudden, without any warning, he heard a long-drawn trumpet wail. He looked up. Sure enough, it was Johnny Thomson! There he was! He had the *Beeler*'s horn at his lips. He was lifting his rust-haired head to the dawnlit sky. He was sending the first, long, mournful notes of *Mack the Knife* from *The Threepenny Opera* singing across the white-capped sea. He let the phrase hang trembling there between high heaven and the sunburst on the water. Then all of an instant the kid went into orbit. His improvised melody flew joyously aloft. He brought it tumbling and tinkling down again. He caught it into a minor key, sent it sailing away once more across the brightening glitter of ocean. He was saying thank you to the chief in the best way he knew. He was telling the newest day about his Julie. It was coming straight from his heart.

"Would you listen to Johnny the Tomcat!" The seaman striking for bosun's mate was chuckling in high glee. "You hear that tomcat blow?"

"He's out there, ain't he? Man, he's way, way out!"

The chief himself was grinning. From the deck, from the bridge, and the signal bays, the watch was looking aft, the faces all alight while Johnny the Tomcat blew. Even the skipper up there in the wing had a most unusual smile in his stern grey eyes. A miraculous thing was happening through the ship. The chief wasn't snarling any more. He didn't have to. Everything fell right into place. And hearing that music's haunting lilt made the chief, with no volition of his own, think suddenly about the redhead on the beach and the eyes with the fiery flecks of green. Cannie! What kind of a cockeyed name was that? The chief frowned heavily.

"O.K.," he growled to his crowd, "she'll hold. Secure! Let's knock it off."

He never intended to see her again. A woman was nothing but trouble, and Chutley was sure he'd had his share. But when he came back to Fleet Landing after having his X-rays at the hospital, she was sitting there on that bench. She just happened to be there, he was sure. So he had to pretend he didn't see her, staring out across the water instead to where his ship lay moored in Tin Can Row. Smartest moor she'd ever made, he remembered, signal flags two-blocking at the yardarm steaming up the channel as if they had her on strings. The skipper brought her alongside on two bells while Johnny the Tomcat blew and all the harbour listened, the lines going over like lightning, tied up and all secure before you could bat an eyelid. And here came a liberty party up the ramp from the landing-float. Look at the way they walked! They had that swagger again, that air of solid pride. You could tell in a minute they were men off the fleet destroyer *Beeler*, the ship from Desron Ten that had just won a unit commendation, the one where Johnny the Tomcat blew a horn that spoke for all of those who couldn't. The magic was in her again. Hank Chutley blinked his eyes.

"Hullo, Chut."

"Hi." He tossed that casual greeting off with studied carelessness at the sound of her clear contralto. "Hi, Cannie," he said.

"Johnny told me what you did," she murmured, standing in front of him now. "Can I say thank you?"

"What for? Just one of my men, that's all."

"Thanks, anyhow." He didn't look at her. "Johnny only had time to patch it up with Julie before he went back on board. He has the duty, you know." She waited. The chief just

grunted. So she sighed. "What a pity! I expected to give him supper. I have a beautiful roast of beef."

Hank Chutley frowned, still peering across the sunlit water to the *Beeler*. Maybe he was remembering how Johnny the Tomcat blew that horn, knowing for certain now he would hear it often again. Maybe in the lonely darkness of the middle watches, steaming out for Pearl Harbour. Maybe on the China Coast, far across the deep blue water. Whenever the hearts of men, oppressed by solitude, needed the comfort of hopeful memory, they would hear the Tomcat blow.

The ship was all right now. He was sure of that. She had found her soul again. He wanted to tell the redhead that. If he did, though, something told him he'd begin to speak about his own soul too. And that wouldn't do. Not for a tough old Navy chief who could get along alone, needing no one. So his voice went harsh.

"I'll bet—" he growled—"I'll bet you're a lousy cook!"

He expected anger from her. He expected to see the wrathful flash of green in her eyes. When he looked, it wasn't there. She was quietly chuckling instead.

"Why don't you come along and find out, Chut?" she said.

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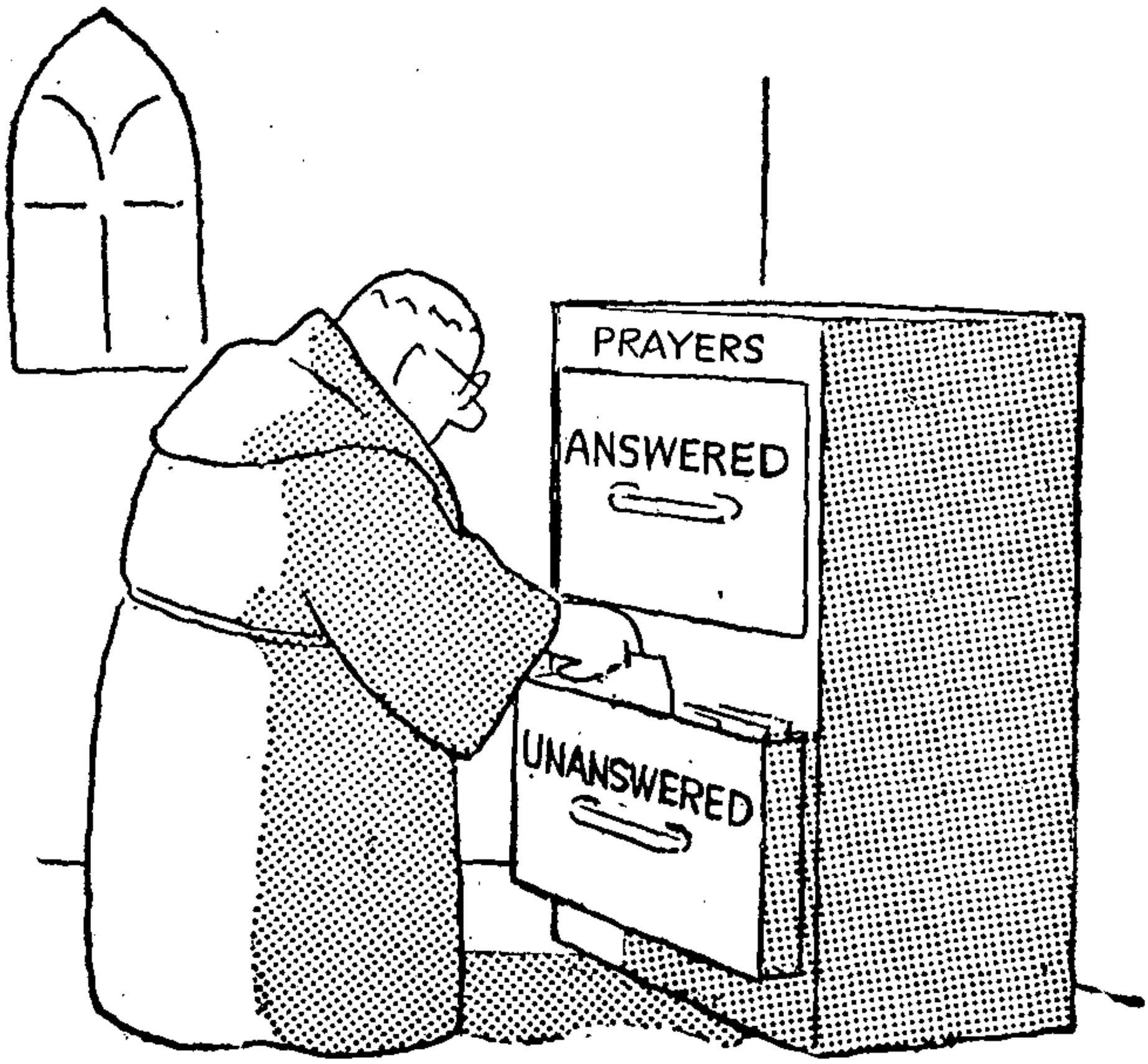

WHAT A RAMP!

" What is it, sir ? "
asked the journalists as one man

BY E. L. MALPASS

OVERJOYED, the simple people of Dinas were, when they heard of the project to turn the Snowdon Mountain Railway into a vast launching ramp for space rockets. A great stimulus to trade this will be, the shopkeepers said, rubbing their hands. It will need more than a jobbing builder and a lad to convert the old track to rocketry. Like the Klondike, the valley will be, with a whole army of workmen and technicians sweeping in like a spring tide.

But it was Price the Provisions who sounded a more sombre note. " All very well while the work is in progress," he warned. " But what about afterwards, when the job is done? What then? " He looked thoughtfully at his picture postcards, his sticks of Dinas rock. " The labourers will have gone. And so will the tourists. Not many visitors hereabouts, without the attraction of the Mountain Railway."

Brought them up short, that did. Perhaps, after all, they would oppose the ramp on aesthetic grounds. But the thought of that army of men, clamouring for food and beer, was too much for them. If only they could have the ramp built *and* continue to attract the visitors.

" I suppose," said Mordecai Protheroe the Farm Produce, " I suppose they would not use this ramp for discharging rockets into space *and* transporting visitors to the summit? "

" Such a compromise would not appeal to the official mind," Price said knowledgeably.

Pondered, they did. At last Price said, " Very satisfactory it would be if the ramp were found on completion to be unsuitable for the purpose intended."

" Blow the thing up, is it? " asked Evans the Fish.

" Subtler methods were occupying my mind," Price said. He sucked his moustache, very thoughtful. Then he began to speak.

The others listened. They listened for a long time.

It was Price's brother-in-law, Owen Porter the Bricks and

Mortar, who eventually got the contract. Very gratifying. A capable man, that Owen. Building everything he was: schools, housing estates, chapels. But even he admitted that the present contract was the biggest he had undertaken.

"Not the sort of job to be completed in a month or two, I suppose?" Price said to him in the dark little room behind the shop.

"No, by damn," said Owen forcefully. "Enough work here to keep us going for years."

"Very beneficial for the town, this influx of labour will be," Price said. He took the lid off the teapot, gave the tea a stir. He looked at his brother-in-law. "And the longer the job lasts the—more—beneficial—it will be."

"Very close to my heart, the welfare of Dinas has always been," Owen said, somewhat emotional.

Price put back the lid on the teapot. He poured out two cups. "The sort of job, would you say, in which any number of snags might cause difficulty and delay?"

Owen nodded. "Particularly delay."

The two men looked at each other gravely. "Wasn't built in a day, that old Rome," Price said.

"No, indeed." They sipped their tea, united in a firm understanding . . .

In his element, Price the Provisions was. Tenors from Treorchy, baritones from Brecon, basses from the entire Principality. He was knee-deep in tonic sol fa. He was forming the biggest powerfullest choir in living memory. The only trouble was, where to put them. There wasn't a hall outside London to accommodate them.

"But why the devil do they have to practise in working hours?" demanded the Minister for Space. Things were not going well with the Snowdon project. He had come hotfoot from Whitehall to find out why.

A combination of bulldozer, steamhammer, and electric dynamo, the Minister was. Not one to brook interference, see. Especially in anything that concerned his brainchild, the launching ramp. First he had forced it on the Cabinet who, in their oldfashioned way, couldn't see what was wrong with a launching *pad*. But the Minister had insisted on a ramp for the first British space rocket. After all, the Russians had got one, built up a great mountain. And it wasn't as if we hadn't one more or less to hand. The Snowdon Mountain Railway would only need a few modifications.

But those few modifications began to assume nightmare

proportions. These Welsh chaps seemed to have no sense of urgency. If it were not too fantastic, he'd have said they were more interested in *Boots* and *Men of Harlech* than in the Snowdon project. Fuming, he went to see Owen Porter the Bricks and Mortar. "You're taking a hell of a time over this job," he barked. "Do you realise you're a good six months behind schedule?"

Pushed his bottom lip out, did Owen. "Wasn't built in a day, that old Rome," he said.

"What the hell's Rome got to do with it?" asked the Minister, puzzled. "We're talking about this ramp. You've already had a couple of years. And where are you? Still in the blasted foothills." He heaved himself out of his chair, marched over to the window, peered unbelieving at the site. "Good God, man, where is everybody?"

Shuffled his feet, did Owen. "Wrestling with the Hallelujah Chorus, I shouldn't wonder."

A heavy, bull-like man, that Minister. For a second he looked as though he were going to charge. Then he seemed to go limp with frustration. He sat down. He put his head in his hands.

Owen looked at him with compassion. "A music-loving nation, the Welsh," he said apologetically.

The Minister shuddered. Then slowly he came to his feet. He pointed a finger at Owen, very denunciatory. "Now listen to me, Porter. The Russians have been in space for years. So have the Americans. They've both beaten us to it. And if we carry on like this, God help us, the Guatemalans and the Argentinians and the Eskimos will all be there before us." Panting with emotion, he was. "Dammit, man, have you no national pride?"

"Yes, indeed, Sir Roderick." Thoroughly ashamed of himself, Owen looked. "Don't you worry, Sir Roderick. Have this thing built in no time, we will now. But terribly difficult it is, working on this old mountain. Snow, ice, gales, cloud—"

"Abominable Snowmen?" sneered the Minister.

Looked at him warily, did Owen Porter. Didn't want to throw away a trump card like that. On the other hand—"Haven't actually had any trouble reported from that quarter," he admitted.

"Very well." The Minister stuck his hands in his pockets. "But you'll have plenty of trouble from another quarter, Porter, if you don't get on with it." He went back to London. He'd given those bally Welshmen something to think about, he told himself smugly . . .

The following Wednesday, he was driving past the Albert Hall. Idly he glanced out of the window. Then: "Stop!" he cried to the driver. He leapt out and stared at the hoardings as though he could not believe his eyes.

THE DINAS MALE VOICE CHOIR

in a selection of Sacred Songs and Solos

he read. This very afternoon.

"I'll give 'em sacred songs and solos," muttered the Minister. He paid his money and went inside.

What looked like the entire labour force was rendering *The Holy City*. Very moving. But it did not move the Minister. He came out and rang up Owen Porter. "How is the job, Mr. Porter?" he snapped.

"Going like a house on fire," Owen said, very reassuring.

"You damned lying Welshman," said Sir Roderick. "I've just come from the Albert Hall."

A bit of silence, at that. Then: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, isn't it." But not too sure of himself, Owen sounded.

"Right, Porter. Now listen to me. Your contract is terminated."

Thunderstruck, Owen was. A fairminded man himself, he expected others to be the same. "Well, there is dictatorial," he said.

"Exactly." The Minister rang off.

Shocked, the people of Dinas were, when they heard of this arbitrary decision. But when the new contractor arrived on the scene they were more than shocked. They were dismayed. And they watched with impotent despair as the working was extended several yards westward, and the project went swiftly and relentlessly forward to its conclusion.

Yes. Finished it almost was. But not quite. And it was at this critical juncture that old Mordecai Protheroe shambled into Price's Emporium to buy some cigarettes. And Price, as he took the money, put his ferret-like face close to Mordecai's ear. "Plan B," he hissed.

It was a Friday evening when the last rail was laid. Nothing now but for the workers to return to their distant homes. The tradespeople of Dinas gazed into a future that seemed stale, flat and—hardest of all to bear—unprofitable. The boom was over.

The labourers turned down the hill. There, leaning on a gate, watching them, as he had watched them so many days, was Mordecai Protheroe. But tonight he did not courteously open the gate for them. No. He said, "What is this contraption you have erected on my land?"

The foreman was one of those fat, red, packed-tight little chaps. "'Tisn't your land," he said. "All that was gone into."

"'Tis my land," said Mordecai, hooking his thumbs in his braces. "Have to shift it, you will."

"Like hell we shall," said the foreman. But he was shaken. Went to see the Clerk of Works. "Bloke up there says it's on his land," he announced.

"Can't be. The legal boys went into all that," said the Clerk of Works, turning a little pale.

"They could have made a mistake. Such things have been known," said the foreman, gloomily revelling in the turn events had taken.

The Minister got the telegram just as he was reaching for his golf clubs. His staff had gone home long ago. "Dammit, I'll go and settle this myself," he said. After all, this launching ramp was his creation. His reputation stood or fell with it. He reached Mordecai's farm on the Saturday afternoon. "Now what's all this nonsense?" he demanded without preamble.

"'Tis on my land," said Mordecai stubbornly.

"I suppose you've got the deeds to prove it?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Right. Fish 'em out. Let's have a look."

"Can't do that, good boy."

"Why ever not?"

"Snug in the bank, they are. Don't open till Monday morning, ten o'clock."

Cooled his heels till Monday, did the Minister. Then down to the bank with Mordecai. They examined the deeds. "Good lord, you're right," said the Minister. "I suppose you couldn't have mentioned this earlier?"

"Never was one to interfere," said Mordecai. "Still," he added comfortingly, "it will not be a big job. Just have to shift it sixty yards to the east, isn't it."

Gave him a look, did the Minister. "Shift it at this point! How the devil do you think we can do that?"

Pulled at his lip, did Mordecai. "Hadn't considered that aspect of the problem," he admitted. Then he cheered up. "Still, not my worry, is it?"

"Oh, it's no problem," the Minister said nastily. "I shall just go straight back to town and make out a Compulsory Purchase Order."

"Ah." Mordecai seemed relieved. "Always find a solution if we give these things a little thought," he said. The Minister

looked at him suspiciously. But the old gentleman returned his gaze with such bland innocence that he felt reassured.

They came out of the bank. Courteously Mordecai helped the Minister into his car, waved him down the street. Then he hurried back to the farm . . .

The following day the Minister was on the telephone. "Everything ready for the launching?" he demanded.

"Afraid not, sir. A Mr. Protheroe has removed part of the track. He said it was on his land."

"But he couldn't. I made a Compulsory Purchase Order."

"Apparently he put you in your car, legged it for the hills, and tore the rails up before the order arrived."

"Then get them relaid, for heaven's sake."

"I gather he's used them to shore up an old barn. The question of trespass—"

"Well, there's plenty of steel in Wales. Tell 'em to make some more."

"It seems all the Welsh steelworkers are on strike, sir."

Frustrated, Sir Roderick began to feel. But he was not the Minister for nothing. A month later the ramp was ready for use. The rocket trolley was ready. Scientists, reporters, television people, the Minister himself, all poured into the valley. The great day had come at last. The long count-down began.

A proud moment, that, for Sir Roderick. There he stood, large, confident, his binoculars slung round his neck. The gleaming rails stretched away to the proud summit of the mountain. On its heavy trolley the rocket, the hope and pride of British Space Research, simmered gently. Only a short time, now, and it would be roaring and flaming away up the track, earthborne, airborne, on its long journey to the stars. The Minister took a deep breath. It was, he reflected, all his own work. But for him, they'd still have been messing about with some second-rate launching pad.

The long day wore on, the long summer's afternoon. Needles flickered, lights flashed, buzzers buzzed, voices muttered. Everything was going according to plan. "Won't be long now," Sir Roderick assured the waiting journalists.

And then his eye caught a distant movement. With a sudden sense of disaster, he brought up his glasses. Far away, near the Protheroe farm, a man in a brown overall was driving a herd of cows towards the track. The leading beast was already nosing at the rails. For one whole stunned second Sir Roderick watched their peaceful progress. Then, "Stop!" he cried. "Stop the count-down."

"Four, three, two—" chanted an inexorable voice.

"Stop!" bellowed Sir Roderick.

The counting ceased. "What is it, sir?" asked the journalists, as one man. Agog they were.

Sagged, the Minister did. He seemed to have lost several stone. "There's a cow on the line," he said in a trembling voice. "A whole herd of blasted cows." Self-pity engulfed him. "Dear heaven, I bet the Russians never had to put up with this sort of thing," he muttered plaintively.

In this bitter moment he became aware of a nervous tugging at his sleeve. He spun round. Mordecai Protheroe was standing there. Very apologetic, he looked. Very apologetic indeed. "Meant to warn you not to discharge your contraption round about milking-time," he said. . .

'Finished Sir Roderick, it did. Even he couldn't live down COW HALTS SPACE PROBE on the front page of *Pravda*.

'But it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. The Government built a nice little launching pad on the South Downs; and, with more people than ever flocking to the top of Snowdon again, there and back in five minutes flat, the simple people of Dinas enjoyed a prosperity such as they had never known.

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A PRINCE OF ABYSSINIA

MR. CALDER was silent, solitary, and generous with everything, from a basket of cherries or mushrooms, to efficient first aid to a child who had tumbled. The children liked him. But their admiration was reserved for his dog.

The great, solemn, sagacious Rasselas was a deerhound. He had been born in the sunlight. His coat was the colour of dry sherry, his nose was blue-black, and his eyes shone like worked amber. From the neat tufts at his heels to the top of his dome-shaped head, there was a royalty about him. He had lived in Courts and consorted on his own terms with other princes.

Mr. Calder's cottage stood at the top of a fold in the Kentish Downs. The road curled up to it from Lamperdown, in the valley. First it climbed slowly between woods, then forked sharply left and rose steeply. The road served only the cottage, and stopped in front of its gate.

Beyond the house there were paths which led through the home fields and into the woods beyond; woods full of primroses, bluebells, pheasants' eggs, chestnuts, hollow trees, and ghosts. The woods did not belong to Mr. Calder. They belonged, in theory, to a syndicate of businessmen from the Medway towns, who came at the weekends, in autumn and winter, to kill birds. When the sound of their shooting-brakes announced their arrival Mr. Calder would call Rasselas indoors. At all other times the great dog roamed freely, in the garden and in the three open fields which formed its domain. But he never went out of sight of the house, nor beyond the sound of his master's voice.

The children said that the dog talked to the man, and this was perhaps not far from the truth. Before Mr. Calder came, the cottage had been inhabited by a bad-tempered oaf who had looked on himself as custodian

The first of a new MICHAEL GILBERT series

for the Medway sportsmen, and had chased and harried the children who, in their turn, had become adept at avoiding him.

When Mr. Calder first came, they had spent a little time in trying him, before finding him harmless. Nor had it taken them long to find out something else. No one could cross the plateau unobserved, small though they might be and quietly though they might move. A pair of sensitive ears would have heard, a pair of amber eyes would have seen; and Rasselas would pad in at the open door and look inquiringly at Mr. Calder, who would say, "Yes, it's the Lightfoot boys and their sister. I saw them too," and Rasselas would stalk out and lie down again in his favourite day-bed, on the sheltered side of the woodpile.

Apart from the children, visitors to the cottage were a rarity. The postman wheeled his bicycle up the hill once a day. Delivery vans appeared at their appointed times; the fishman on Tuesdays, the grocer on Thursdays, the butcher on Fridays. In the summer, occasional hikers wandered past, unaware that their approach, their passing, and their withdrawal had all been reported to the owner of the cottage.

Mr. Calder's only regular visitor was Mr. Behrens, the retired schoolmaster, who lived in the neck of the valley, two hundred yards outside Lamperdown village, in a house which had once been the Rectory. Mr. Behrens kept bees, and lived with his aunt. His forward stooping head, his wrinkled, brown skin, blinking eyes, and cross expression made him look like a tortoise which has been roused untimely from its winter sleep.

Once or twice a week, summer and winter, Mr. Behrens would get out his curious tweed hat and his iron-tipped walking-stick, and would go tip-tapping up the hill to have tea with Mr. Calder. The dog knew and tolerated Mr. Behrens, who would scratch his ears and say, "Rasselas. Silly name. *You* came from Persia, not Abyssinia." It was believed that the two old gentlemen played backgammon.

There were other peculiarities about Mr. Calder's ménage which were not so apparent to the casual onlooker.

When he first took over the house, some of the alterations he

had asked for had caused Mr. Benskin, the builder, to scratch his head. Why, for instance, had he wanted one perfectly good southern-looking window filled in, and two more opened on the north side of the house? Mr. Calder had been vague. He said that he liked an all-round view and plenty of fresh air. In which case, asked Mr. Benskin, why had he insisted on heavy shutters on all downstairs windows and a steel plate behind the woodwork of the front and back doors?

There had also been the curious matter of the telephone line. When Mr. Calder had mentioned that he was having the telephone installed, Mr. Benskin had laughed. The post office, overwhelmed as they were with post-war work, were hardly likely to carry their line of poles a full mile up the hill for one, solitary cottage. But Mr. Benskin had been wrong, and on two counts. Not only had the post office installed a telephone with surprising promptness, but they had actually dug a trench and brought it in underground.

When this was reported to him, Mr. Benskin had told the public bar of the Golden Lion that he had always known there was something odd about Mr. Calder.

"He's an inventor," he said. "To my mind, there's no doubt that's what he is. An inventor. He's got Government support. Otherwise how'd he get a telephone line laid like that?"

Had Mr. Benskin been able to observe Mr. Calder getting out of bed in the morning, he would have been fortified in his opinion. For it is a well-known fact that inventors are odd, and Mr. Calder's routine on rising was a very odd matter indeed.

Summer and winter he would wake half an hour before dawn. He turned on no electric light. Instead, armed with a big torch, he would pad downstairs, the cold nose of Rasselas a few inches behind him, and make a minute inspection of the three ground-floor rooms. On the edges of the shutters were certain tiny, thread-like wires, almost invisible to the naked eye. When he had satisfied himself that these were in order, Mr. Calder would return upstairs and get dressed.

By this time day was coming up. The darkness had withdrawn across the bare meadows and chased the ghosts back into the surrounding woods. Mr. Calder would take a pair of heavy naval binoculars from his dressing-table and, sitting back from the window, would study with care the edges of his domain. Nothing escaped his attention. A wattle hurdle blocking a path; a bent sapling at the edge of the glade; a scut of fresh earth in the hedge. The inspection was repeated from the windows on the opposite side.

Then, whistling softly to himself, Mr. Calder would

walk downstairs to cook breakfast for himself and Rasselas.

The postman, who arrived at eleven o'clock, brought the newspapers with the letters. Perhaps because he lived alone and saw so few people, Mr. Calder seemed particularly fond of his letters and papers. He opened them with a loving care which an observer might have found ludicrous. His fingers caressed the envelope or the wrapping paper very gently, as a man will squeeze a cigar, his head cocked. Often he would hold an envelope up to the light as if he could read, through the outer covering, the message inside. Sometimes he would even weigh an envelope in the delicate letter scales which he kept on top of his desk between a stuffed seagull and a night-scented jasmine in a pot.

On a fine morning in May, when the sun was fulfilling, in majesty, the promise of a misty dawn, Mr. Calder unfolded his

copy of *The Times*, turned, as was his custom, to the foreign news pages, and started to read.

He had stretched his hand out towards his coffee cup when he stopped. It was a tiny check, a break in the natural sequence of his actions, but it was enough to make Rasselas look up. Mr. Calder smiled reassuringly at the dog. His hand resumed its movement, picked up the cup, carried it to his mouth. But the dog was not easy.

Mr. Calder read once more the five-line item which had caught his attention. Then he glanced at his watch, went across to the telephone, dialled a Lamperdown number, and spoke to Jack, at the garage, which also ran a taxi service.

"Just do it if we hurry," said Jack. "Not a lot of time to spare, really. I'll come right up."

While he waited for the taxi, Mr. Calder first telephoned Mr. Behrens, to warn him that they might have to postpone their game of backgammon. Then he spent a little time telling Rasselas that he was leaving him in charge of the cottage; but that he would be back before dark. Rasselas swept the carpet with his feathery tail, and made no attempt to follow Mr. Calder when Jack's Austin came charging up the hill and reversed in front of the cottage gate.

In the end, the train was ten minutes late at the junction, and Mr. Calder caught it with great ease.

He got out at Victoria, walked down Victoria Street, turned to the right opposite the open space where the Colonial Office used to stand, and to the right again into the square which is bounded on the east by the outer wall of the Abbey Sanctuary, on the north by a furniture repository, and on the west and south by buildings which were intended as private houses but were now used as rather select offices. In the south-west corner stands the Westminster branch of the London and Home Counties Bank.

Mr. Calder walked into the bank. The head cashier, Mr. Macleod, nodded gravely to him and said, "Mr. Fortescue is ready. You can go straight in."

"I'm afraid the train was late," said Mr. Calder. "We lost ten minutes at the junction, and never caught it up."

"Trains are not as reliable now as they were in my young days," agreed Mr. Macleod.

A young lady from a nearby office had just finished banking the previous day's takings. Mr. Macleod was watching her out of the corner of his eye until the door had shut behind her. Then he said, with exactly the same inflection, but more softly, "Will it be necessary to make any special arrangements for your departure?"

"Oh no, thank you," said Mr. Calder. "That's quite all right. I took all the necessary precautions."

"Fine," said Mr. Macleod. He held open the heavy door, panelled in sham walnut in the style affected by prewar bank designers, ushered Mr. Calder into the ante-room, and left him there for a few moments in contemplation of its only ornament, a reproduction in a massive gilt frame of Landseer's allegory *The Tug of War*. Thrift and Industry appeared to be on the point of gaining a hard-fought victory over Luxury and Extravagance.

Then the head cashier reappeared, and held open the door for Mr. Calder to go through.

Mr. Fortescue, who came forward to greet him, would have been identified in any company as a bank manager. It was not only the conventional dress, the square, sagacious face, the suggestion that as soon as his office door closed behind him, he would extract an old pipe and push it into his discreet but friendly mouth. It was more than that. It was the bearing, the balance, the air of certainty and stability in a dubious and unstable world which sits upon a man when he is the representative of a corporation with a hundred million pounds of disclosed assets.

"Nice to see you," he said. "Grab a chair. Any trouble on the way up?"

"No trouble," said Mr. Calder. "I don't think anything can start for another two or three weeks."

"They might have post-dated the item to put you off your guard." He picked up his own copy of *The Times* and re-read the four-and-a-half lines of print which recorded that Colonel Josef Weinleben, the international expert on bacterial antibodies, had died in Klagenfurt as the result of an abdominal operation.

"No," said Calder. "He wanted me to read it, and sweat."

"It would be the established procedure to organise his own 'death' before setting out on a serious mission," Mr. Fortescue agreed. He picked up a heavy paperknife, a gift from an important insurance company, and tapped thoughtfully with it on the desk. "But it could be true, this time. Weinleben must be nearly sixty."

"He's coming," said Mr. Calder. "I can feel it in my bones. It may even be true that he's ill. If he was dying, he'd like to take me along with him."

"What makes you so sure?"

"I tortured him," said Mr. Calder. "And broke him. He wouldn't forget that."

"No," said Mr. Fortescue. He held the point of the paperknife towards the window, sighting down it as if it had been a pistol. "No. I think very likely you're right. We'll try to pick

him up at the ports, and tag him. But we can't guarantee to stop him getting in. If he tries to operate, of course, he'll have to show his hand. You've got your permanent cover. Do you want anything extra?"

(He might, thought Mr. Calder, have been speaking to a customer. You've got your normal overdraft. Do you want any extra accommodation, Mr. Calder? The bank is here to serve you. There was something at the same time ridiculous and comforting in treating life and death as though they were entries in the same balance sheet.)

"I'm not at all sure that I want you to stop him," he said. "We aren't at war. You could only deport him. It might be more satisfactory to let him through."

"Do you know," said Mr. Fortescue, "the same thought had occurred to me."

Mrs. Farmer, who kept the Seven Gables Guest House between Aylesford and Bearsted, considered Mr. Wendon a perfect guest. His passport, and the card which he had duly filled in on arrival, showed him to be a Dutchman; but his English, though accented in odd places, was colloquial and fluent. An upright, redfaced, greyhaired man, he was particularly nice with Mrs. Farmer's two young children. Moreover, he gave no trouble. He was—and this was a sovereign virtue in Mrs. Farmer's eyes—methodical and predictable.

Every morning, in the endless succession of fine days which heralded that summer, he would go out walking, clad in aged but respectable tweed, field-glasses over one shoulder, a small knapsack on the other for camera, sandwiches, and vacuum flask. And in the evenings he would sit in the lounge, drinking a single glass of schnapps as an aperitif to his dinner, and entertaining Tom and Rebecca with accounts of the birds he had observed that day. It was difficult to imagine, seeing him sitting there, gentle, placid, and upright, that he had killed men and women—and children, too—with his own well-kept hands. But then Mr. Wendon, or Weinleben, or Weber, was a remarkable man.

On the tenth day of his stay he received a letter from Holland. Its contents seemed to cause him some satisfaction, and he read it twice before putting it away in his wallet. The stamps he tore off, giving them to Mrs. Farmer for Tom.

"I may be a little late this evening," he said. "I am meeting a friend at Maidstone. Don't keep dinner for me."

That morning he packed his knapsack with particular care, and caught the Maidstone bus at Aylesford crossroads. He had said that he was going to Maidstone and he never told unnecessary lies.

After that, his movements became somewhat complicated, but by four o'clock he was safely ensconced in a dry ditch to the north of the Old Rectory at Lamperdown. Here he consumed a biscuit, and observed the front drive of the house.

At a quarter past four Jack arrived with his taxi and Mr. Behrens' aunt came out, wearing, despite the heat of the day, coat and gloves and a rather saucy scarf, and was installed in the back seat. Mr. Behrens handed in her shopping basket, waved good-bye, and retired into the house.

Five minutes later Mr. Wendon was knocking at the front door. Mr. Behrens opened it, and blinked when he saw the gun in his visitor's hand.

"I must ask you to turn round and walk in front of me," said Mr. Wendon.

"Why should I?" said Mr. Behrens. He sounded more irritated than alarmed.

"If you don't, I shall shoot you," said Mr. Wendon. He said it exactly as if he meant it. After a moment Mr. Behrens wheeled about, and said, "Where now?"

"That looks the sort of place I had in mind," said Mr. Wendon. "Open the door and walk in. But quite slowly."

It was a small dark room, devoted to hats, coats, sticks, old tennis rackets, croquet mallets, bee veils, and wellington boots.

"Excellent," said Mr. Wendon. He helped himself to the old-fashioned tweed hat and the iron-tipped walking-stick which Mr. Behrens carried abroad with him on all his perambulations of the countryside. "A small window and a stout, old-fashioned door. What could be better?"

Still watching Mr. Behrens closely, he laid down the hat and stick on the hall table, dipped his left hand into his own coat pocket, and brought out a curious metal object.

"You have not, perhaps, seen one of these before? It works on the same principles as a Mills grenade, but is quite six times as powerful, and is incendiary as well as explosive. When I shut this door I shall bolt it, and hang the grenade from the upturned bolt. The least disturbance will dislodge it. It is quite powerful enough to blow the door down."

"All right," said Mr. Behrens. "But get on with it. My aunt will be back soon."

"Not until eight o'clock, if she adheres to last week's arrangements," said Mr. Wendon.

He closed the door, shot the bolts top and bottom, and suspended the grenade with artistic care from the top one.

Mr. Calder had finished his tea by five o'clock, and shortly afterwards strolled down to the end of the paddock, where he

was repairing the fence. Rasselas lay quietly in the lee of the woodpile. The golden afternoon turned imperceptibly towards evening.

Rasselas wrinkled his velvet muzzle to dislodge a fly. On one side he could hear Mr. Calder digging with his mattock into the hilltop chalk and grunting as he dug. Behind, some four fields away, a horse, fly-plagued, was kicking its heels and bucking. Then away to his left he located a familiar sound. The clink of an iron-tipped walking-stick on stone.

Rasselas liked to greet the arrival of this particular friend of his master, but he waited, with dignity, until the familiar tweed hat came into view. Then he unfolded himself, and trotted gently out into the road.

So strong was the force of custom, so disarming were the familiar and expected sight and sound, that even Rasselas' five senses were declined. But his instinct was awake. The figure was still a dozen paces off and advancing confidently when Rasselas stopped. His eyes searched the figure. Right appearance, right hat, right noises. But wrong gait. Quicker and more purposeful than their old friend. And, above all, wrong smell.

The dog hackled, then crouched as if to jump. But it was the man who jumped. He leapt straight at the dog, his hand came out from under his coat, and the loaded stick hissed through the air with brutal force. Rasselas was still moving, and the blow missed his head, but struck him full on the back of the neck. He went down without a sound.

Mr. Calder finished digging the socket for the corner post he was planting, straightened his back, and decided that he would fetch the brush and creosote from the house. As he came out of the paddock, he saw the great dog lying on the road.

He ran forward, and knelt in the dust.

Blood was running from the broken skin, forming a pool in the road. As he got his hand under his head, Rasselas opened his eyes and tried to move. He seemed to be paralysed, but the neck, Mr. Calder thought, was not broken. Help must be called at once.

A voice which he recognised spoke from behind him.

"Keep your hands in sight," said Colonel Weinleben, "and try not to make any sudden or unexpected move."

Mr. Calder straightened his head.

"Was it you who hit my dog?"

"Certainly."

"It was a savage and unnecessary thing to do."

"On the contrary, it was entirely necessary."

"He is not dead. A vet must be called, at once."

"If he is not dead now," said Colonel Weinleben, "he will be before evening. You too. Let us move back now into the house. I should like to devote at least as much attention to you, as you did to me, on the last occasion we met."

Mr. Calder remained on his knees.

"If you do not get up," said the Colonel, "I shall fire a bullet into the body of your dog."

Mr. Calder rose, quite slowly.

"Now," said the Colonel. "Into the cottage. March." As he said this, he himself spun round, took a stiff stride forward, and fell, face downward. Mr. Calder looked at him incuriously. From the shattered hole in the side of his head a little dark blood oozed.

It was Mr. Behrens who had killed Colonel Weinleben, with a single shot from a .310 rifle, fired from the edge of the wood. The rifle was fitted with a telescopic sight, but the shot was a fine one, even for a marksman like Mr. Behrens. He had spent half an hour breaking out of the window and had run for nearly a quarter of a mile before firing; he had to get into position very quickly, and he had only just been able to see the top half of the Colonel's head over the intervening hedge.

He burst through this hedge now, saw Rasselas, and started to curse.

"He opened his eyes just now," said Mr. Calder, who was back on his knees in the road, the dog's head on his lap. "The neck isn't broken, but there's some paralysis. Telephone Newton, and tell him to come straight out in his car." As an afterthought, he added, "We ought perhaps to clear *him* out of the way before Newton gets here."

Mr. Newton, the vet, knew Rasselas well. He abandoned a crowded surgery, and reached the cottage inside a quarter of an hour. "Some damn motorist, I suppose," he said. "Have you got a shutter or something we could slide under him and get him indoors?"

He was feeling gently round the neck as he spoke and now he got busy with a hypodermic syringe. Half an hour later the big dog sneezed, growled softly, and tried to wriggle his huge body. "He's going to be an awkward invalid," said Newton. "Would you like me to take him back with me?"

"I'd rather keep him, if you think I can do what's necessary."

"It's chiefly nursing and patience," said the vet. "He'll need a second shot of this stuff to make him sleep tonight. I'll leave the syringe with you. He can drink as much as he wants, but don't give him anything to eat, and don't let him move unnecessarily. I'll be out tomorrow morning."

So busy were Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens at the exacting job of sick nurse to Rasselas that it was some hours later before they remembered the Colonel at all. He was in the woodshed, stiffening fast. They dug a grave in the wood, and rolled him into it, grudging every minute of the time. The Colonel was the illegitimate son of a cobbler from Mainz, and greatly inferior to Rasselas, both in birth and breeding. © Michael Gilbert·1962

Something Fishy

My first meeting with the policeman, soon after my arrival in Bruach, had left a distinctly droll impression on both our minds. I had been on my way back to Morag's one drearily wet evening when I had come upon his car parked plumb in the centre of the road, without lights of any sort. A little farther along the road a lorry too was stopped and beside it the policeman, watched attentively by the lorry driver, was siphoning petrol out of the tank of the lorry into a can. When he had transferred the petrol to the tank of his own car, the policeman generously offered me a lift home . . . I invited him in for a meal.

Earlier in the day Erchy had handed me a parcel of fish which he had said offhandedly were mackerel. I cooked one for the policeman. Before the meal he had seemed much dispirited by the results of his day's work, but after the fish and several cups of tea his geniality was restored. Indeed he became quite jovial. He complimented me on my cooking and when he got up to go he impressed upon me that I must be very sure to thank Erchy for him and tell him that he, the policeman, had "never tasted mackerel like them." I assured him I would do so.

"He said what?" demanded Erchy when I had innocently kept my promise.

"He asked me to tell you he'd never tasted mackerel so good."

"Damty sure he hasn't," muttered Erchy, turning a little pale. "Why the Hell did you want to let him see them?"

"But you told me they were mackerel. Weren't they?"

"Mackerel indeed! D'you mean to say you can't tell the difference between what's a trout and what's a mackerel? And do you not know trout's illegal?"

At that stage of my initiation I was incapable of distinguishing a legal fish from an illegal one. . .

Erchy stared at me with both pity and amazement. "Sometimes," he said crushingly, "I think school teachers is the most ignorantest people out."

LILLIAN BECKWITH, *The Sea for Breakfast*

THE CRY OF GEESE

They liked to fly by
the light of full moons

BY EDMUND GILLIGAN

AN April snow lay scattered and melting on the banks of Ram's Horn Creek, where Abel Delahanty idly paddled his duck-boat on an ebbing tide.

Vivid against frost-cracked stems of winter, the fresh stalks cast their shadows on traces of snow. At times, while he floated down the winding passage to the Hudson River, the wind whirled tiny spouts of snow crystals across his hands. The crystals vanished at once in the warmth of his seamed, scarred hands—great dark hands that never changed in colour because their labour never changed.

Aloft and farther downstream rare music sounded and gentled his mouth to a serene smile. "Ah, it's you, is it?"

On the bare crown of a dead ash tree a hermit thrush sang its intricate, sweet-toned phrases. The bird held its head so clear against the sky that Abel could see its brown, mottled throat pulsing. When he glided under the tree, his paddle at ease, he heard the bird's mate uttering her response in the quiet cedars yonder.

Around Long Bend, the cat-o'-nine-tails took the place of wild rice, and redwinged blackbirds perched on the cat-o'-nine-tail spikes and called gaily across the water. Where the bend straightened towards the river he smiled in a fresh pleasure, for here he saw the first flower of spring, an arbutus—one white blossom, one nearly pink—in a glowing array upon a rift of snow.

The marsh grew louder with springtime music—murmur of the tide against fallen stalks, rustle of first leaves of hazel trees and alders. Where the lagoons lay quiet in the sun, he heard the chatter of wood ducks at their housekeeping in the box nests he had put up for them. He then heard distant chords of other, wilder music far away. The better to listen, he laid his paddle across his knees and gazed into the eastward sky. For most of his sixty years he had eagerly awaited those wilderness bugle notes aloft, in springtime and in autumn, yet his joy on first hearing

them after a winter's silence had never waned. The cry of geese meant more to him than all other music.

The falling tide tugged so briskly at his boat that a gurgling sound marred the silence. He laid hold of an alder bough and ran his boat into a shoal of lily pads. There the sunlight fell freely upon him. He took off his cap to enjoy the warmth, to let it soothe his bony, wind-stained cheeks. The wind stirred his disorderly thatch of black hair, streaked by grey where it lay down the nape of his neck.

He scanned the southern sky. A party of mallard ducks burst out of the reeds in such a clatter of wings and voices that for a time he could hear no hint of the approaching music. Soon it rang delicately clear, this time closer. At last, a wedge of wild geese—thirty birds and more—came winging in towards the river.

He could tell that they were weary after a night of flying against the winds. Their wings beat heavily. They flew through such a dazzle of sunlight that he could see milder gleams piercing their pinions in the outward beats. Even while he watched, he made out another sign of weariness. Their leader, in the van to break a passage and steer their immemorial course, cried out a signal, asking for relief from that harsh duty. The pattern broke to let another goose take the lead. The wedge formed again and flew on towards Abel's place. " And now you are here! "

Once again he smiled in pleasure at their beauty; and then, his heart roused by their weariness, he cupped his hands and called to them, " Aroink! Aroink! " He knew that at times, especially after a long flight in darkness, they became confused and might pass over a resting place, a shelter such as the great marsh provided.

The geese were now directly overhead. They had heard his greeting call. The leader veered away and rose in a turn towards the marsh. The wedge swung lower. The first birds set their wings for a descent.

At that moment Abel heard a shout on the river bank above the mouth of the creek. He believed it to be a cry of pleasure from another watcher. He was about to call the geese again when a rifle shot cracked in that direction. This angered him. He flinched at the echo. He didn't think a true sportsman would attempt such a shot. Yet he gazed anxiously at the geese.

They had heard the shot. In silence they began to climb in shorter, brisker beats to their first course for the river. Abruptly the V pattern broke again. Their cries rang piteously aloft, cries of fear and bafflement. A bird at the end of the wedge soared downwards in a faltering manner. Others turned sharply after it and soared beneath it.

Such a confused jabbering began up there that Abel knew something had gone wrong among the yearling birds to which the easier flight positions in the rear were assigned. When that faltering bird set its wings and slanted down, he understood what had happened. The careless rifle shot, fired for no reason at all, had struck that bird.

The wounded bird flashed out of sight beyond the willows at the river's edge, where their fresh leaves created a mild green haze.

Bitterly Abel blamed himself for his call to the geese. He had lured them out of their course. Because of his action, one goose lay dying on the river. The image hurt him. Long long ago he had ceased to hunt those birds because he did not care to interfere at all with their lives, their hard passages to the bays of Canada or the bays of Virginia. Now he had unwittingly hurt one of them, bound north to their ancestral breeding-grounds, to the mate, the nest, eggs, and beloved goslings-to-be.

His sorrow became worse because he believed there was nothing he could do, except to resolve that he would never call geese again. Even so, he did not resist the impulse of his heart that forced him to take up his paddle and send his boat gliding swiftly round the last bend.

In that passage towards the river all his joy in the return of spring—the buds of his thousand apple trees, the thrush song and arbutus gleam—changed, not exactly to sadness but to a melancholy strain, as if he had just learnt, far too late, a lesson he couldn't quite comprehend. Often before he had heard an inward voice hinting of a lack, a hidden, tender desire. It had never taken a true form; and it did not now, even in this keen access of its strength.

A vessel beyond the willows bayed a signal. Gliding in much beauty, its azure hull matching the sky and its white bridge matching the clouds, a Swedish freighter bound for the port of Albany showed itself in the openings of the forest. Flying low over its wake, a number of gulls vaulted upwards. At first Abel believed the gulls were following the vessel in a search for food. They were not. They were answering signals from other gulls that screamed in a place hidden from him by reeds.

Abel knew that gulls prefer to keep silent. Their endless flying creates endless hunger. Except for early-morning crankiness, when famine is at its worst among them, they search in silence, heads down, eyes glaringly intent. Nothing eatable escapes their vision. So scanty is their fare that they must examine every floating object, even a bit of odd-coloured cloth. He had often seen them at the moment of discovery when the hope of meat

excited them to shrieks of exultation. He had seen them in cruel actions many a time, even in his orchard, where they soared hawklike, watching for a rabbit that had met disaster. The screams he now heard were just such blares of exultation.

His boat struck into the river. He steered towards a sand-bar. There he saw the gulls that had been concealed. They were coursing downstream, rising in silent, frantic curves, then swooping. It was in the swoop that they shrieked. And they rose and fell in a pattern of eight or nine birds, one following the other, and the first curving hastily back to swoop and scream again.

"What are you up to now?"

Abel thought they had caught sight of a crippled striped bass or possibly an injured duckling, lost from a brood of native mallards. He had seen such attacks by them and had counted it in the ways of nature, ways to be accepted. Nevertheless, that first impulse had not entirely died in his heart. At the next cry—not from a gull—his impulse became something stronger: a call to action. He had never heard such a cry before. He could tell only that neither a gull nor a duckling had uttered it.

At the next stroke of his paddle and after a long glide forward he saw what was crying so strangely—a young goose, a gander thrusting violently forward, unable to rise because its wings beat too weakly. When its grey breast surged up from the ripple, a spurt of blood glittered.

A gull swooped and struck at the gander's head. The gander shrank and tried to dive. He could not. Violent blows of his wings baffled the next attack. The second attacker swept off, and a third came in its turn, its beak closed to stab. Again the gander thrust his head into the poor protection of the water.

The gulls were trying to drown the gander. When he lifted his head to breathe, a gull struck him between the eyes. Blood appeared on the gander's white cheek.

The gander had seen the reeds along the shore. He kept trying to reach them. Repeated blows hurt him so much that he could not stay on that course. He tried to fly. His wings struck spray around him. This effort cost him so much strength that he folded his wings and lay shuddering on the tide, his beak under water. Two gulls alighted near him and swam towards his head. Abel thrust his paddle deep and drove his boat between the gulls and the gander. He lifted the wounded bird into the boat. The gulls flew silently away.

During the passage up the creek the gander lay on its side. It seemed lifeless. Blood seeped out of its breast feathers on the right side. Abel knew this wound had been made by the rifle bullet.

He went ashore where the creek flowed out of his pond. He wrapped the gander in a strip of soft canvas and trudged up the lane to his stone cottage, where he had fended for himself many a long year...

He carried the gander into his workshop, where he mended tools and tied trout flies on winter evenings. He switched on the strong lamp of his fly-tying vice and parted the feathers that lay soggy over the wound.

It was then that he found the other wound, where the bullet had passed through the gander's back. When he began cutting away the dark feathers of the back, the gander feebly struck with his beak.

"Good for you, gander! Where there's such life, there's hope."

He stopped both wounds with adhesive tape and placed the bird in a box of straw near the coal stove in his kitchen. After watching for a time, Abel saw that the gander couldn't keep its head up. He nailed in a wooden support and bound the gander to it, making sure it could breathe. In a little while the gander made a croaking sound and wearily clacked its beak.

"Now if you live the night, friend, I'll do more for you if I can."

During the night the gander repeated his croaking call so loudly that Abel came into the kitchen. At the touch of his hand, the gander beat his wings frantically. This show of strength encouraged Abel so much that he removed the support. In doing this he had to touch the gander. It began a low clucking and lay so quietly in the straw that Abel perceived the bird had lost all fear of him.

At daybreak, when he made his porridge of oatmeal, he mixed some with milk and tried to spoon it into the gander's gullet. This didn't work well, but the bird didn't flinch.

The next day, when Abel returned from the first spraying of his orchard, he found the gander out of the nest. It hadn't gone far. That night the gander willingly thrust its bill into a deep dish of porridge and fed in desperate awkwardness.

On Sunday Abel carried the gander to the shore of his pond and put it down on the sunlit grass, close enough to the water so that the gander could go in if it wished to do so. There were two tenants of the pond, a pair of white barnyard ducks, one called Henry and the other Alice. Their only duty was to look pretty. They spoke amiably to the gander and made no objection when he joined them at their dish of mash. Abel left the three together.

When he came back, he found the gander in the water, not swimming, just floating near the shore.

In the following days the gander became quite friendly with the ducks, despite the incredulous stares that they often turned upon him. He began to swim farther and farther after them. Yet he considered Abel his best friend. At nightfall, when Abel stood by the door and clapped his hands, the gander came out of the reeds and took its place in the kitchen nest.

Before another week had passed, the gander tried its wings. To the ducks, far too plump ever to manage more than a stately waddle, his first flight seemed an astonishing feat. When he rose they looked, not at him, but at each other.

Abel watched the gander rise higher and higher. Once above the elms, the gander uttered an exulting cry. He flew well, and his wounds had healed. Yet Abel feared that the gander couldn't go north by itself, that it might come to worse harm. In its flight the gander displayed such beauty that Abel wished it never to leave him.

He struck his hands together and shouted. At once the gander set its wings and slanted down to the pond.

Despite his pleasure in the gander's company, Abel took no long time to understand that, once again, he was interfering with the life of a creature apart from him and his ways. This idea came in the middle of a rainy night when a flight of geese on the way north flew so close to his roof that their shouting awakened him. Their cries had disturbed the gander too.' He began that curious croaking. Twice he beat his wings loudly in his nest.

Before the gander began its next flight over the pond, it stayed for a while under the lilac boughs, where the first clusters were blooming. Its head lowered, it appeared to be brooding. At times it thrust its beak into the repaired feathers of its breast.

When the ducks paddled out of the reeds and quacked their greetings, the gander rose into the wind. This flight carried it higher than ever before, so high, indeed, that Abel feared it might never return to him.

Aloft, the gander cried plaintively. It rode the wind towards the marsh and slowly veered into a circling passage over the rows of apple trees, all in white bloom.

Abel knew the purpose of such flights when they were made in the wilderness. They were to fix in the bird's memory an image of the birthplace, the bays around it, and the islands. Thus the landmarks were learnt. By following their mothers in the first water journeys, then in the short flights, they learnt to go farther and farther from their nests and to return at night. Flying a greater distance each day, the geese became familiar with the Canadian marshes. Before the migrations began, they had flown a hundred miles away and had returned.

Abel made up his mind not to summon the gander down. So many geese were coming into the marsh, day and night, that he convinced himself, not very easily, that his friend would find company for the migration.

He went to bed. At daybreak he found the gander waiting on the doorstep.

"This won't do, gander. You must go north with the others."

So, about noon, he called the gander, fed him well, and took him in his arms to the duck-boat. He paddled down Ram's Horn Creek, the gander's head resting quietly on the gunwale forrad.

At the river's edge, under willows beginning to bend under new leaves, Abel listened. He heard a grouse drumming and a pheasant calling beyond the willows. Wood ducks flashed away.

Abel drove his boat into a high stand of rice on the river bank. There, above the rustling of a flood tide, he heard geese at their gossip in the reeds. Three geese glided out. Others followed, until there were about forty floating idly about.

"Now, gander, here be your true friends. You go to them. Do you hear? Good-bye and good luck—and I'm sorry I delayed things for you."

He placed the gander in the water. It left the reeds and swam out. The tide carried it towards the flock. The flock came slowly on—one with its head high and eyes alert. They greeted the newcomer with low, chuckling cries.

When the gander had entered the flock, Abel struck the water flatly with his paddle. In a thrash of wings, all the birds flew off and down the river. They mounted directly towards the sun.

For a time Abel saw nothing, because the light dazzled his eyes. Soon, out of the sun, a newly-formed wedge flew northwards. He heard their first cries in various tones. After that the steady "Aroink! aroink!" began, the trumpet cries of the elder birds rallying all to the thousands of miles yet before them.

"Good-bye to you, gander. Good-bye."

Summer flushed across his lands. Fragrances of apple blossoms changed to fragrances of ripening fruit. With every passing day the work in Abel's orchards increased. He hired men for the picking and worked on, making ready for the last of autumn. Soon boxes began to pile up in his barns; and the leaves of the elms changed to yellow and floated down.

In this time, especially at night when the work was well done, Abel used to take a turn along the edge of the pond and look up at the harvest moon, changing from red to gold over the river. He thought very often about his wild goose, his tamed wild goose gone wild again. He imagined the gander was far away over the

Canadian border, perhaps in the marshes north of Saskatchewan.

It seemed strange to him that the gander had come to have such a deep meaning, for he considered himself, by nature, not a lonely man. He had had a man's share of company in his time. Nevertheless, he couldn't stop the workings of a heart that sent his thought far up into the red moon, and beyond the Great Bear, and the Pole Star, and on into the vast spaces of wind and light where his companion had ventured with the migrating flock.

He lay awake one night for longer than usual. He had taken half his apples to market and had found a fair price for them. The other half he had put in storage to wait for a better price.

Once he had worked out his accounts in his mind, he found his drowsy thought turning again to the lost gander. And by staying with his thought, by driving it along the starry routes of their flight, he struck upon a reason why, in mind and heart, the wounded goose had such a meaning.

It's because I love them so. Because they are brave and wise, and they know the ways of the eagle in the air, which the Scripture tells us we can't know.

He considered the wild geese to be a mystery. That was it. Who could ever explain the melancholy, sweet influence their migrating chant had in the hearts of all men who listened? To him, and to all men, their ways were wonderful and strange, just as wonderful as were the flood tides and the ebb. What a wonder of creation that a moon, a quarter of a million miles away, could drive neap tides so loudly through the rice and cat-o'-nine-tails.

And, he told himself, the wild geese knew just as much about the moon as he did, if not more. Moons and tides were parts of their being. Indeed, they were creatures of the moon, were its partners. They liked to fly by the light of full moons because such moons showed the way. And they knew tides too. Rafted on the river, they waited for high water until they could reach food without walking on muddy banks, from which they could not quickly rise in time of danger.

His eyes closed. He had done a lot of thinking. He had worked it all out to his satisfaction. That is why he stirred angrily and murmured when, at the edge of sleep, a pang of longing coursed through his heart.

Longing? No, he couldn't surely say that it was longing. A mystery had hold of him. He could not quiet himself until he let his heart have its way. This given, all his heart offered him was a memory of the migrating call, one to the other calling in the starlit sky where powerfully they flew, star by star, flighting away now from icebound waters and onward to estuaries that still obeyed the moon.

He slept at last, his longing not understood, but put away in his secret heart where, for ever and ever, other longings lay quiet, never moving him to tears again or to memories of tears once shed.

Winter winds sent the curled leaves soaring. Blackbirds met in tens of thousands over the marsh and, wings whirring louder than the scattering leaves, streamed away to the south. In the evenings when winds blew off the river, Abel heard the high shrill chatter of teal and the wood ducks calling to their ducklings. He set out stores of grain for the chipmunks, who were still working hard, cheeks full, to fill their bins. At nightfall he went into the orchard and shook down apples from trees he kept apart for does and fawns, up from the marsh to taste early cider.

Employed in this way, he heard the first flight of geese coming in from Canada. They were far across the river. Their rhythmic calls soon waned. Later in the night, while he read a book by the kitchen stove, he heard other geese. Louder and louder the calling sounded, and soon it too died away, leaving only an echo, not a true echo under his eaves, only an echo in his heart, endlessly repeated.

The wind changed to the north, and a roaring like surf on an ice-strewn beach overwhelmed all other sounds. He had never noticed the north wind much. This time its tide-like music filled him with a kind of regret—and this surprised him. He carefully read another page and closed the book to go to bed.

A lull came in the wind's blowing. It seemed to be dying down or hauling to the westward. When Abel opened his bedroom window, he heard again the melancholy wailing of geese overhead, above the clouds close to earth. As before, the music waned, and the night became silent; then, in keener accents, the music floated down to him. The calls were now coming from the north, and lower, much lower.

It seemed clear to Abel that the geese were seeking the river and for some reason couldn't make sure of it. In a harsher, bugle-like blare, the flock came over again, this time so far down that he peered out to see if he could spy them against the stars.

Silence returned. But not for long. He had hardly closed his eyes when all the voices aloft sang out in an accent that seemed a beseechment, many times repeated and always nearer. A gust of wind blew crackling out of the orchard and broke against the bare boughs of his elms in such a clatter that once again the goose cry fell away to nothing.

Pity for the wayfarers rose in his heart. After day-long, night-long beating against changing winds, their hearts and wings must now be weary. He wished they might find their way down. In a

flood of fiery light, the moon soared out of the clouds. Moonlight washed over the world to light the waters for the geese. They were silent.

At daybreak Abel began the easier chores of his winter months. He made his breakfast and went out into the yard to carry the mash to the ducks. To his surprise, Henry lay ashore, and near him stood Alice, plainly a little upset. They gazed at each other intently, bent their heads to new angles, and looked smartly at each other sideways. They were in a witty mood, clucking and clacking.

Abel put down their pan. He walked to the pond. The cat-o'-nine-tails on the far side of the pond parted. A wild goose swam out, a handsome gander. Abel, not wishing to frighten the bird, stepped back a pace. The gander turned and entered the reeds.

The bird's easy manner struck Abel quickly. He clapped his hands together in the old signal.

The gander started out, swam across the pond and came directly to Abel's feet.

"Is it you, gander? Really, is it you?"

Abel held out his hand. The gander laid his head on the outstretched fingers and made his curious croaking sound.

"Was it you, gander, flying over last night? Trying to come home?"

The gander stayed there a little longer. He repeated the sound, far down in his dark throat. After that he turned and swam back to the reeds, entering at exactly the same place. He began talking in there, a quick, urgent note. Abel saw the beautiful wings and throat patch gleaming among the yellow stalks.

The reeds parted again and the gander appeared. He beat his wings lightly and swayed, rippling his image. There now came after him eight other birds, the first a lovely goose. The others were goslings, plump and strong in their flight feathers. To the gander's order they swam forward to the grass at Abel's feet.

"Why, you are welcome, gander and wife and goslings. Welcome home."

When the gander came ashore to be fondled again, there rose strongly in Abel's heart the same pang that had hurt him when the gander had departed. Even now, when all his anxiety had ended, he could not give a name to his heart's pain.

He bent down and whispered, "So you remembered me, gander?"

The moment he said the words, his heart cleared. He understood that all he had really wanted was to be remembered, to be remembered by somebody, something. Not to be forgotten.

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By readers' special request:
from Jonah & Co.

Berry flirts with Fortune

By

DORNFORD YATES

"MY DEAR," said Berry, "be reasonable."

"With pleasure," said Daphne. "But I'm not going to let you off."

Her husband frowned upon a roll.

"When I say," he said, "that I have a feeling today that my luck is in, I'm not being funny. Only once before have I had that conviction. I was at Cannes at the time—on the point of leaving for Paris. I went to Monte Carlo instead. That night I picked up over six hundred pounds."

"I know," said his wife. "You've often told me. But I can't help it. I made you give me your word before we came here, and I'm not going to let you off."

"I gave it without thinking," declared her husband. "Besides, I never dreamed I should have this feeling."

"I did," said Daphne shortly. "That's why I made you promise. Have some more coffee?"

Pointedly ignoring the invitation, Berry returned to his roll and, after eyeing it with disgust which the bread in no way deserved, proceeded to disrupt and eviscerate it with every circumstance of barbarity. Covertly, Jonah and I exchanged smiles. . .

We had been staying at San Sebastian and this was our last day. The weather had been superb, and we had been out and about the whole day long. Of an evening—save for one memorable exception—we had been to the Casino. . .

For as long as I could remember, Berry had had a weakness for roulette. For baccarat, petits chevaux, and the rest he cared nothing: fifty pounds a year would have covered his racing bets: if he played bridge, it was by request. My brother-in-law was no

gambler. There was something, however, about the shining wheel, sunk in its board of green cloth, which he found irresistible.

Remembering this fascination, my sister had broached the matter so soon as we had decided to visit San Sebastian, with the happy result that, ere we left Pau, her husband had promised her three things. The first was to leave his cheque-books at home; the second, to take with him no more than two hundred pounds; the third, to send for no more money.

And now the inevitable had happened.

The two hundred pounds were gone—every penny; we were not due to leave until the morrow; and—Berry was perfectly satisfied that his luck had changed. As for the promises his wife had extracted, he was repenting his rashness as heartily as she was commending her prevision.

"Nothing," said Berry, turning again to the charge, "was said about borrowing, was it?"

"No."

"Very well, then. Boy and Jonah'll have to lend me something. I'm not going to let a chance like this go."

"Sorry, old chap," said Jonah, "but we've got to pay the hotel bill. Thanks to your activities, we're landed with——"

"How much have you got?" demanded Berry.

I cut in and threw the cards on the table.

"Brother," I said, "we love you. For that reason alone we won't lend you a paper franc. But then you knew that before you asked us."

My brother-in-law groaned.

"I tell you," he affirmed, "you're throwing away money. With another two hundred and fifty I could do anything. I can feel it in my bones."

"You'd lose the lot," said Jonah. "Besides, you've eaten your cake. If you'd limited yourself last night and played rationally, instead of buttering the board. . . ."

"I'm sure," said Jill, "you ought to have played on a system. If you'd put a pound on RED and kept on doubling each time you lost——"

"Yes," said Berry. "That's an exhilarating stunt, that is. Before you know where you are, you've got to put two hundred and fifty-six pounds on an even chance to get one back. With a limit of four hundred and eighty staring you in the face, that takes a shade more nerve than I can produce. I did try it once—at Madeira. Luck was with me. After three hours I'd made four shillings and lost half a stone . . . Incidentally, when a man starts playing roulette on a system, it's time to pray for his soul. I admit there are hundreds who do it—hundreds of intelligent, educated, thoughtful men and women. Well, you can pray for the lot. They're trying to read something which isn't written. They're studying a blank page. They're splitting their brains over a matter on which an idiot's advice would be as valuable.

"I knew a brilliant commercial lawyer who used to sit down at

Dornford Yates

His books sold by the million, he had a chateau in the French Pyrenees, a house in the hills of Southern Rhodesia, and a genius for writing adventure stories in the grand manner.

He also created Berry & Co.

Forty years ago, Cecil William Mercer, alias Dornford Yates, introduced through the pages of the Windsor Magazine, the fabulous Pleydells of the county of Hampshire: Berry, Boy, Daphne, Jonah and Jill. Today, they are still quoted by a bewilderingly varied public including schoolboys, maiden aunts, Cyril Connolly and John Betjeman; because, like anything of noble vintage, the Pleydells improve with the years.

Here they are then, in all their splendour, holidaying in Spain complete with two blue coupés and Berry's intuition—suspect to all but himself. A gamble? Maybe, but a gamble that *could* pay off . . .

the table and solemnly write down every number that turned up for one hour. For the next sixty minutes he planked still more solemnly on the ones that had turned up least often. Conceive such a frame of mind. That wonderful brain had failed to grasp the one simple glaring point of which his case consisted—that roulette is lawless. He failed to appreciate that he was up against Fortune herself. He couldn't realise that because 7 had turned up seven times running at a quarter past nine, that was no earthly reason why 7 shouldn't turn up eight times running at a quarter past ten. Heaven knows what fun he got out of it. For me, the whole joy of the thing is that you're flirting with Fate."

He closed his eyes suddenly and flung back his head. "Oh," he breathed, "I tell you she's going to smile tonight. I can see the light in her eyes. I have a feeling that she's going to be very kind . . . very kind . . . somehow . . ."

We let him linger over the fond reflection, eyeing one another uneasily. It was, we felt, but the prelude to a more formidable attack.

We were right. "I demand," barked Berry, "that I be allowed the wherewithal to prosecute my suit."

"Not a farthing," said Daphne. "To think that that two hundred pounds is gone makes me feel ill."

"That's exactly why I want to win it back—and more also." He looked round desperately.

"Anybody want a birthright? For two hundred and fifty quid—I'd change my name."

"It sounds idiotic, I know," said I, "but supposing—supposing you lost."

"I shan't tonight," said Berry.

"Sure?"

"Positive. I tell you, I feel——"

"And you," said Jonah scornfully, "you have the temerity to talk about praying for others' souls. You sit there and—"

"I tell you," insisted Berry, "that I have a premonition. Look here. If I don't have a dart tonight, I shall never be the same man again. Boy, I implore you—"

I shook my head.

"Nothing doing," I said. "You'll thank us one day."

"You don't understand," wailed Berry. "You've never known the feeling that you were bound to win."

"Yes, I have—often. And it's invariably proved a most expensive sensation."

There was a moment's silence. Then—

"Right," said my brother-in-law. "You're one and all determined to see me go down. You've watched me drop two hundred, and not one of you's going to give me a hand to help me pick it up. It may be high-minded, but it's hardly cordial. Some people might call it churlish . . . Upon my soul, you are a cold-blooded crowd. Have you ever known a deal I wouldn't come in on? And now, because you are virtuous, I'm to lose my fun . . . Ugh! Hymn Number Four Hundred and Seventy-Seven, 'The Cakes and Ale are Over.'"

Struggling with laughter, Adèle left her seat and, coming quickly behind him, set her white hands upon his shoulders.

"Dear old chap," she said, laying her cheek against his, "look at it this way. You're begging and praying us to let you down. Yes, you are. And if we helped you to break your word, neither you nor we would ever, at the bottom of our hearts, think quite so much of us again. And that's not good enough. Even if you won five thousand pounds it wouldn't compensate. Respect and self-respect aren't things you can buy."

"But, sweetheart," objected Berry, "nothing was said about borrowing. Daphne admits it. If I can raise some money without reference to my bankers, I'm at liberty to do so."

"Certainly," said Adèle. "But *we* mustn't help. If that was allowed, it'd knock the bottom out of your promise. You and Daphne and we are all in the same stable: and that—to mix metaphors—puts us out of court. If you ran into a fellow you knew, and he would lend you some money, or you found a hundred in the street, or a letter for you arrived—"

"—or one of the lift-boys died, leaving me sole legatee . . . I see. Then I should be within my rights. In fact, if anything which

"can't happen came to pass, no one would raise any objection to my taking advantage of it. You know, you're getting too generous."

"That's better," said Adèle. "A moment ago we were cold-blooded."

Berry winced.

"I take it back," he said humbly. "Your central heating arrangements, at any rate, are in perfect order. Unless your heart was glowing, your soft little cheek wouldn't be half so warm."

"I don't know about that," said Adèle, straightening her back. "But we try to be sporting. And that's your fault," she added. "You've taught us."

The applause which greeted this remark was interrupted by the entry of a waiter bearing some letters which had been forwarded from Pau.

A registered package, for which Berry was requested to sign, set us all thinking.

"Whatever is it?" said Daphne.

"I can't imagine," replied her husband, scrutinising the post-mark. "Paris? I've ordered nothing from Paris that I can remember."

"Open it quick," said Jonah. "Perhaps it's some wherewithal."

Berry hacked at the string.

The next instant he leapt to his feet.

"Fate!" he shrieked. "Fate! I told you my luck was in!" He turned to his wife breathlessly. "'Member those Bonds you wanted me to go in for? Over a month ago I applied for twenty-five. I'd forgotten about the trash—and *here they are!*"

Two hours and a half had gone by, and we were rounding a tremendous horseshoe bend on the way to Zarauz, when my wife touched Berry upon the arm.

"Aren't you excited?" she said.

"Just a trifle," he answered. "But I'm trying to tread it under. It's essential that I should keep cool. When you're arm in arm with Fortune, you're apt to lose your head. And then you're done. The jade'll give me my cues—I'm sure of it. But she won't shout them. I've got to keep my eyes skinned and my ears pricked, if I'm going to pick them up."

"If I," said Adèle, "were in your shoes, I should be just gibbering."

It was, indeed, a queer business.

The dramatic appearance of the funds had startled us all. Had they arrived earlier, had they come in the shape of something less easily negotiable than Bearer Bonds, had they been representing more or less than precisely the very sum which Berry had named in his appeal, we might have labelled the matter "Coincidence," and thought no more of it. Such a label, however, refused to stick. The affair ranked with thunder out of a cloudless sky.

As for my sister, with the wind taken out of her sails, she had hauled down her flag. The thing was too hard for her.

It was Jonah who had sprung a mine in the midst of our amazement.

"Stop," he had cried. "Where's yesterday's paper? Those things are Bonds, and, unless I'm utterly mistaken, there was a drawing two days ago. One of those little fellows may be worth a thousand pounds."

The paper had confirmed his report . . .

The thought that, but for his wit, we might have released such substance to clutch at such a shadow, had set us all twittering more than ever.

At once a council had been held.

Finally it had been decided to visit a bank and, before we disposed of the Bonds, to ask for and search the official bulletin in which are published the results of all Government Lottery Draws.

Inquiry, however, had revealed that the day was some sort of a holiday, and that no banks would be open.

At last a financier was unearthed—a changer of money. In execrable French he had put himself at our service.

"Yes, he had the bulletin. It had arrived this morning . . ."

Feverishly we searched its pages.

Once we had found the column, a glance was enough. Our Bonds bore consecutive numbers, of which the first figure was "o." The series appeared to be unfortunate. The winning list contained not a single representative.

More reassured than disappointed, we raised the question of a loan.

Our gentleman picked at the Bonds and wrinkled his nose. After a little, he offered one hundred pounds.

This was absurd, and we said so.

The Bonds were worth two hundred and fifty pounds, and were as good as hard cash. The fellow had no office, and, when we wanted him again, as like as not he would have disappeared. His personal appearance was against him.

When we protested, his answer came pat. He was no money-lender. In the past ten years he had not advanced ten pesetas. He was a changer of money, a broker, and nothing else.

Finally he offered one hundred and fifty pounds—at sixty per cent a year *or part of a year*. For one so ignorant of usury, this was not bad.

We thanked him acidly, offered the Bonds for sale and, after a little calculation, accepted two hundred and forty-three pounds in Spanish notes.

Half an hour later we had climbed into the two cars, anxious to make the most of our last day in Spain . . .

If the way to Zarauz was handsome, that from Zarauz to Zumaya was fit for a king. Perhaps a mile from the village we ate our lunch.

The comfortable hush which should succeed a hearty meal made in the open air upon a summer's day was well established. Daphne and Adèle were murmuring conversation: pipe in mouth, Jonah was blinking into a pair of field-glasses: and I was lying flat upon

my back, neither smoking not sleeping, but gradually losing consciousness with a cigarette in my hand.

I had come to the point of postponing through sheer lethargy the onerous duty of lifting the cigarette to my lips when, with an oath that ripped the air, Jonah started to his feet.

Sleep went flying.

I sat up amazedly, propping myself on my hands.

With dropped jaw, my cousin was staring through the glasses as a man who is looking upon sudden death. While I watched, he lowered them, peered into the distance, clapped them again to his eyes, let them fall, glanced swiftly to right and left, shut his mouth with a snap, and made a dash for the cars.

With his hand upon the car's door, he turned and pointed a trembling forefinger along the valley.

"There's Zed," he cried. "My horse. Haven't seen him since Cambrai. Leading a team, and they're flogging him."

I fancy he knew I should join him, for he never closed the car door. As he changed into second, I swung myself inboard. A moment later we were flying along the dusty road . . .

Zed had been Jonah's charger for over three years. Together, for month after month, the two had endured the rough and revelled in the smooth. They had shared misery, and they had shared ease. Together, many times, they had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. And, while the animal must have loved Jonah, my cousin was devoted to the horse.

Jonah was shot through the knee and sent to England; and Zed—poor Zed disappeared.

My cousin's efforts to trace him were superhuman. Unhappily his groom had been killed when Jonah was wounded and, though all manner of authorities from the Director of Remounts downwards had lent their official aid, though a most particular description had been circulated and special instructions issued to all the depots through which the horse might pass, to his lasting grief Jonah had never heard of Zed again.

And now . . . I found myself praying that he had not been mistaken.

Jonah was driving like a man possessed.

We tore up a rise, whipped round a bend and, coming suddenly upon a road on our right, passed it with locked wheels.

The noise my cousin made, as he changed into reverse, showed that his love for Zed was overwhelming.

We shot backward, stopped, stormed to the right, and streaked up a shocking road at forty-five. We flashed into a hamlet, turned at right angles, missed a wagon by an inch, and flung up a frightful track towards a farm.

Then, before I knew what had happened, we had stopped dead, and Jonah's door was open and he was limping across the road.

In the jaws of a rude gateway stood a wagon of stones. Harnessed to this were three sorry-looking mules and, leading them, the piteous

wreck of what had been a blue roan. The latter was down—and out.

For this the immediate reason was plain.

The teamster, better qualified for the treadmill, had so steered his wagon that the hub of its off forewheel had met the gatepost. This he had not observed but, a firm believer in the omnipotency of the lash, had determined to reduce the check, whatever might be its cause, by methods of blood and iron. Either because he was the most convenient or by virtue of his status, the leader had received the brunt of the attack. That is, of course, one way of driving.

The blue roan was down, and his master had just kicked him in the belly when Jonah arrived.

The Spaniard was a big fellow, but my cousin has wrists of steel.

He took the whip from its owner as one takes a toy from a baby. Then with the butt he hit him across the mouth. The Spaniard reeled, caught his foot on a stone, and fell heavily. Jonah threw down the whip and took off his coat.

" I don't want to kill him," he said quietly.

When the other rose, he looked extremely ugly. This was largely due to the fact that most of his front teeth were missing and that it was difficult, because of the blood, to see exactly where his face ended and his mouth began. The look in his eyes, however, was suggesting the intent to kill.

He had no idea, of course, that he was facing perhaps the one man living who could have thrashed a champion . . .

It is not often that you will see half a dozen of the most illustrious members of the National Sporting Club attending an Assault-at-Arms held at a public school. Three years running I had that honour. The gentlemen came to see Jonah. And though no applause was allowed during the boxing, they always broke the rule. In due season my cousin went to Oxford. In his second year, in the Inter-University contest, he knocked his opponent out in seven seconds. The latter remained unconscious for more than six hours, each crawling one of which took a year off Jonah's life. From that day my cousin never put on the gloves again. . .

All, however, that the Spaniard saw was a tall lazy-looking man with a game leg, who by his gross interference had taken him by surprise.

He lowered his head and actually ran upon his fate.

I have never seen punishment at once so frightful and so punctiliously administered. Jonah worked with the swift precision of the surgeon about the operating-table. He confessed afterwards that this chief concern was to keep his opponent too blind with rage to see the wisdom of capitulation. He need not have worried.

When it had become obvious that the blessed gifts of sight, smell, and hearing had been almost wholly withdrawn from the gentleman; when, in fact, he had practically ceased attempting to defend himself, and merely bellowed with mortification at every stinging blow, Jonah knocked him sprawling on to the midden, and drew off his washleather gloves.

The next moment he was down on his knees beside the roan,

plucking at the rough harness with trembling fingers. Once the horse sought to rise, but at Jonah's word he stopped and laid down his head.

Between us we got him clear. Then we stood back, and Jonah called him.

With a piteous effort the roan got upon his legs. That there was back trouble and at least one hock was sprung, I saw at a glance. The horse had been broken down. He was still blowing badly, and I ran for the flask in the car. When I came back, Jonah was caressing his charger with tears running down his cheeks . . .

There is a listlessness, born of harsh treatment, suckled on dying hopes, reared on the bitter memory of happier days, which is more eloquent than tears. There is an air of frozen misery, of a despair so deep that a kind word has come to lose its meaning, which none but horses wear.

Looking upon Zed, I felt ashamed to be a man.

Gaunt, filthy, and tottering, the flies mercilessly busy about three shocking sores, the roan was presenting a terrible indictment to be filed against the Day of Judgment. " . . . And not one of them is forgotten before God . . . " But there was worse than pain of body here. The dull, see-nothing eyes, the heavy-laden head, the awful stricken mien, told of a tragedy to make the angels weep—a thoroughbred, not dead, but with a broken heart.

We had administered the brandy, Jonah was bathing a sore, and I had made a wisp and was rubbing Zed down, when—

" Good day," said a voice.

With his arms folded upon the sill, a little greyheaded man was watching us from a window.

I looked up and nodded.

" Good day," I said.

" Ah like boxing," said the man. " Ah've bin twelve years in the States, an' Ah'd rather see boxing than a bullfight. You like baseball? "

I shook my head.

" I've never seen it," I said.

" Haven't missed much," was the reply. " But Ah like boxing. You visiting Spain? "

" For a few days."

" 'S a fine country. Bin to Sevilla? "

Entirely ignoring the violence which he had just witnessed, to say nothing of our trespass upon his property and our continued attention to his horse, the farmer proceeded to discuss the merits and shortcomings of Spain with as much detached composure as if we had met him in a tavern.

At length Jonah got up.

" Will you sell me this horse? "

" Yes," said the man, " Ah will."

" What d'you want for him? "

" Five hundred pesetas."

" Right," said Jonah. " Have you got a halter? "

The man disappeared. Presently he emerged from a door, halter in hand.

The twenty pounds passed, and Zed was ours.

Tenderly my cousin fitted the halter about the drooping head.

" One more effort, old chap," he said gently, turning towards the gate . . .

Out of compassion for the mules, I drew the farmer's attention to the hub which was nursing the gatepost.

He just nodded. " Pedro could never drive," he said.

" I should get a new carter," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. The he jerked his head in the direction of the carcass upon the midden.

" He is my stepfather. We do not speak," he said simply.

We found the others in the hamlet through which we had passed. There I handed over the car to my wife and thence Jonah and Zed and I walked to Zumaya.

To find a box at the station was more than we had dared hope for, but there it was—empty and waiting to be returned to San Sebastian. Beneath the influence of twenty-five pesetas, the station-master saw no good reason why it should not be returned by the evening train.

We left Jonah to accompany his horse and hurried home by car to seek a stable.

When we sat down to dinner that night at eight o'clock, Jonah called for the wine-list and ordered a magnum of champagne.

When the wine was poured, he raised his glass and looked at me.

" Thank you for helping me," he said. He glanced round with his eyes glowing. " And all of you for being so glad." He drank and touched Adèle upon the shoulder. " In a loose-box, up to his knees in straw, with an armful of hay to pick over, and no congestion . . . Have you ever felt you wanted to get up and dance? " He turned to Berry. " Brother, your best. May you spot the winner tonight, as I did this afternoon."

" Thank you," said Berry, " thank you. I must confess I'd been hoping for some sort of intuition as to what to do. But I've not had a hint so far. Perhaps, when I get to the table . . . It's silly, of course. One mustn't expect too much, but I had the feeling that I was going to be given a tip. You know. Like striking a dud egg, and putting your shirt on a horse called ' Attar of Roses.' Never mind. Let's talk about something else. Why did you call him ' Zed ' ? "

" Short for ' Zero,' " said Jonah. " I think my groom started it, and I— "

" Zero," said Berry quietly. " I'm much obliged."

It was a quarter to eleven, and Berry had lost one hundred and seventy pounds.

Across her husband's back Daphne threw me a despairing glance. Upon the opposite side of the table my wife and Jill, one upon either side of Jonah, stared miserably before them. I lighted my tenth cigarette and wondered what Berry had done . . .

The table was crowded.

From their points of vantage the eight croupiers alternately did their business and regarded the assembly with a bored air.

A beautifully dressed American, who had been losing, observed the luck of her neighbour, a burly Dutchman, with envious eyes. With a remonstrance in every fingertip, a debonair Frenchman was laughingly upbraiding his fellow for giving him bad advice. From above his hornrimmed spectacles an old gentleman in a blue suit watched the remorseless rake jerk his five pesetas into " the Bank " in evident annoyance. Cheek by jowl with a dainty English-woman, who reminded me irresistibly of a Dresden shepherdess, a Spanish Jew who had won was explosively disputing with a croupier the amount of his stake. Two South Americans were leaning across the table, nonchalantly " plastering the board. " A little old lady, with an enormous bag, was thanking an elegant Spaniard for disposing her stake as she desired. Finger to lip, a tall Spanish girl in a large black hat was sizing her remaining counters with a faint frown.

" I am going," said Berry, " to suspend my courtship and smoke a cigarette. Possibly I'm going too strong. If I give the lady a rest, she may think more of me."

" I suppose, " said Daphne, " you're bent on losing it all."

Her husband frowned.

" Fortune favours the bold," he said shortly. " You see, she's just proving me. If I were to falter, she'd turn me down."

It was impossible not to admire such confidence.

I bade my sister take heart.

" Much," I concluded, " may be done with forty pounds."

" Fifty," corrected Berry. " Hullo! Here's a new shift."

It was true.

The eight croupiers were going off duty. As they vacated their seats, eight other gentlemen in black immediately replaced them.

Berry extinguished his cigarette and handed me his last bunch of notes. In exchange for these, with the peculiar delicacy of his kind, the croupier upon my right selected, arrayed, and offered me counters of the value of forty English pounds.

He might have been spared his pains.

As I was piling the money by Berry's side—

" Zero," announced a nasal voice.

" We're off," said my brother-in-law. " Will you see that they pay me right? "

One hundred and seventy-five pounds.

Ere I had completed my calculation—

" Zero," repeated the nasal voice.

" I said so," said Berry, raising his eyebrows. "I had the maximum that time. Will you be so good? Thank you."

Trembling with excitement, I started to count the equivalent of four hundred and ninety pounds.

Berry was addressing the croupier.

" No. Don't touch the stake. She's not finished yet."

" Esta hecho? "

" Don't leave it all," begged Daphne. " Take— "

" No va mas."

Desperately I started to check the money again.

" Zero."

There was a long gasp of wonderment, immediately followed by a buzz of exclamation. The two Frenchmen were laughing and nodding their congratulations. The little old lady was bowing and beaming goodwill. Excepting, perhaps, the croupiers, Berry seemed less concerned than anyone present.

" No. I'm not going to stop," he said gently, " because that would be foolish. But I'll give it a miss this time, because it's not coming up. It's no longer a question of guessing, dear. I tell you, I *know*. "

The ball went flying. After a moment's interval—

" Ocho (eight)," announced the croupier.

" You see," said Berry. " I should have lost my money. Now this time my old friend Zero will come along."

On to the white-edged rectangle went fourteen pounds.

A few seconds later I was receiving four hundred and ninety. . .

I began to feel dazed. As for counting the money, it was out of the question. Idiotically I began to arrange the counters in little piles.

35 turned up.

" That's right," said Berry quietly. " And now . . . It's really very monotonous, but . . ."

With a shrug of his shoulders, he set the limit on Zero.

I held my breath . . .

The ball ceased to rattle—began to fall—ricocheted from stud to stud—tumbled into the wheel—nosed 32—and . . . fell with a click into 0.

Berry spread out his hands.

" I tell you," he said, " it's too easy. And now, again."

" Don't! " cried Daphne. " Don't! I beg you— "

" My darling," said Berry, " after tonight—no, leave the stake, please—I'll never play again. This evening—well, the money's there, and we may as well have it, mayn't we? I mean, it isn't as if I hadn't been given the tip. From the moment I woke this morning—Listen, dear. Don't bother about the wheel—the lady's been hammering away. You must admit, she's done the job thoroughly. First the intuition; then the wherewithal; then, what to back. I should be a bottle-nosed mug if I didn't— "

" Zero."

Upon the explosion of excitement which greeted the astounding event, patrons of the baccarat table and of the other roulette wheel left their seats and came crowding openmouthed to see what was toward. Complete strangers were chattering like old friends. Gibbering with emotion, the Spanish Jew was dramatically recounting what had occurred. The Dutchman was sitting back, laughing boisterously. The Frenchmen were waving and crying, " Vive l'Angleterre."

Berry bowed his acknowledgments.

As in a dream, I watched them send for more money.

When it arrived, they gave me four hundred and ninety pounds.

" Hagan juego, senores "

Berry shook his head. "Not this time," he said quietly.

He was right. After a look at o the ball ran with a click into 15.

A long sigh of relief followed its settlement.

" You see? " said Berry, picking up fourteen pounds.

" Don't," I said weakly. " Don't. I can't bear it. The board's bewitched. If it turns up again, I shall collapse."

" You mean that? " said Berry, putting the money on.

" No va mas."

" I do. My heart— "

" Then say your prayers," said my brother-in-law. " For, as I live, that ball's going to pick out— "

" Zero."

I never remember such a scene.

Everybody in the room seemed to be shouting. I know I was. Respectable Spaniards stamped upon the floor like bulls. The Frenchmen, who with Berry and several others had backed the winner, were clasping one another and singing the Marseillaise. The beautifully dressed American was wringing my wife's hand. The old gentleman in the blue suit was on his feet and appeared to be making a speech. The Spanish girl was standing upon her chair, waving a handkerchief.

In vain the smiling croupiers appealed for order. . . .

As the tumult subsided—

" Seven times in ten spins," said Berry, " Well, I think that'll do. We'll just run up the board on the even chances."

There was no holding him.

Before I knew where I was, he had set twelve thousand pesetas apiece on RED, ODD, and UNDER 19.

Some fourteen hundred pounds on a single spin.

I covered my eyes.

As the ball began to lose way, the hush was awful.

" Siete (seven)," announced the spokesman.

With my brain whirling, I sought to garner the harvest . . .

My brother-in-law rose to his feet.

" One last throw," he said. " PASSE for ' The Poor.' "

He leaned forward and put the maximum on OVER 18.

A moment later, counter by counter, four hundred and seventy pounds went into the poor-box.

As I pushed back my chair, I glanced at my watch.

In exactly sixteen minutes Berry had stung " the Bank " to the tune of—as near as I could make it—four thousand nine hundred and ninety-five pounds . . .

Some ten hours later we slipped out of San Sebastian and on to the famous road which leads to Biarritz. Berry, Daphne, and Jill were in one car, and Adèle and I were in the other. Jonah and Zed were to travel together by train. It was improbable that they would leave for Pau before the morrow.

As we climbed out of Béhobie, we took our last look at Spain, that realm of majestic distances and superb backgrounds. . .

You may peer into the face of France and find it lovely; the more you magnify an English landscape, the richer it will become; but to find the whole beauty of Spain, a man must stand back and lift up his eyes.

Now that we had left it behind, the pride and grandeur of the scenery beggared description. It was as though for days we had been looking upon a mighty canvas, and while we had caught something of its splendour, now for the first time had we focused it aright. The memory we took away was that of a masterpiece.

Anxious to be home in time for luncheon, I laid hold of the wheel. We whipped through St. Jean de Luz, sang through Bidart, and hobbled over a fearful stretch of metalling into Bayonne.

As we were nearing Bidache—

"How much," said Adèle suddenly, "is Berry actually up?"

"Allowing for everything," said I, "that is, his losses, what he gave to the poor, and the various rates of exchange, about two hundred and forty thousand francs."

"Not too bad," said Adèle thoughtfully. "All the same—"

A report like that of a gun blew the sentence to blazes.

Heavily I took the car in to the side of the road.

A second tyre went upon the outskirts of Pau.

Happily we had two spare wheels . . .

As I was wearily resuming my seat, Berry, Daphne, and Jill went by with a cheer. Slowly we followed them into the town . . .

It was not until we were stealing up our own villa's drive that at length I remembered the question which for over an hour I had been meaning to put to my wife.

As I brought the car to a standstill—

"What was it," I demanded, "that you had begun to say when we had the first burst near Bidache? We were talking about how much Berry was up, and you said——"

The most bloodcurdling yell that I have ever heard fell upon our ears.

For a moment we stared at one another. Then we fell out of the car by opposite doors and flew up the steps . . .

Extended upon a chair in the hall, Berry was bellowing, clawing at his temples and drumming with his heels upon the floor.

Huddled together, Daphne and Jill were poring over a letter with starting eyes.

Dear Sir,

*In case the fact has not already come to your notice, we hasten to inform you that as a result of the drawing, which took place on Monday last, one of the Bonds, which we yesterday dispatched to you per registered post, has won the first prize of fr.*500,000 (*five hundred thousand francs*).

By way of confirmation, we beg to enclose a cutting from the official bulletin.

We should, perhaps, point out that, in all announcements of the results of drawings, the o *or zero, which for some reason invariably precedes the number of a Bond, is disregarded.*

Awaiting the pleasure of your instructions,

We beg to remain, dear sir,

Your obedient servants,

It was perhaps five hours later that my memory again responded, and I turned to Adèle.

"The dam burst," said I, "at the very moment when you were going to tell me what you had been about to say when the first tyre went outside Bidache. Sounds like 'The House that Jack built,' doesn't it?"

"Oh, I know," said Adèle, laughing. "But it's no good now. I was going to say— "

The door opened, and a servant came in with a wire.

I picked up the form and weighed it thoughtfully.

"Wonderfully quick," I said. "It was half past two when I was at the bank, and I couldn't have been at the post office before a quarter to three. I looked at my watch. Just under four hours."

"The bank?" said Adèle, staring. "But you said you were going to the club."

I nodded.

"I know. I was anxious to raise no false hopes. All the same, I couldn't help feeling that half a million francs were worth a tenpenny wire. Therefore I telegraphed to Jonah. His answer will show whether that tenpenny wire was worth half a million francs."

My wife snatched the form from my hand and tore it open. It was very short.

BONDS REPURCHASED JONAH.

But my memory never recovered from the two-fold slight.

To this day I cannot remember to ask Adèle what it was that she had been about to say when the first tyre burst outside Bidache.

With a hoe nonny-no
Come on, birds, unlock your throats!
Come on, gardeners, shed your coats!
Come on zephyrs, come on flowers,
Come on grass, and violet showers!
And come on, lambs, in frisking flocks!
Salute the vernal equinox!
Twang the cheerful lute and zither!
Spring is absolutely hither!

OGDEN NASH, *Spring Song*

AGONY

While holidaying in Carthage I met a beautiful and wealthy woman. She seems highly-strung and threatens suicide if I leave; but I am young and want to see the world before I settle down. What should I tell her?
AENEAS

I like sailing and want to be a ferryman. Is there any future in it? My friends say it's a dead-end sort of a job.
CHARON

I am attracted to an older woman. We have a lot in common and get on well together. Do you think the difference in our ages will affect our future happiness?
OEDIPUS

Some Greeks have left a wooden horse outside our city wall. It would appear to be a sort of gift. Would it be rude to leave it outside? It's very big.
PRIAM

I am staying with friends. Hanging over my chair in the dining-room there is a large ornamental sword. It doesn't look terribly safe to me. Should I mention it?
DAMOCLES

I am being bothered by the attentions of a swan. How can I discourage him? I don't want to hurt his feelings.
LEDA

COLUMNS

I am suffering agonies through an embarrassing affliction of the hair. When I ask my friends for advice they just give a stony stare. Can you help?

MEDUSA

My husband is quite talented with the harp, and wants to make a career out of it. Do you think this will ever be of practical use to us?
EURYDICE

My young man has left me and our two children, taking with him a golden fleece of considerable sentimental value. How can I get him back? I am a good cook, and a clever nurse.

MEDEA

We housewives are getting pretty fed up with the way our husbands are behaving. Suggestions for bringing them to heel would be welcomed.
LYSISTRATA

Can you suggest any useful publications on bullfighting? I must learn pretty fast. Is there a helpful book on pot-holing, too?

THESEUS

Please can you suggest a suitable gown for me to wear at an unusually large family funeral I must attend? I have been told that mourning becomes me.
ELECTRA

HAMLIN

By Rosemary Harris

AT THREE O'CLOCK, the children would come out to play. They were bright and rosy, full of high spirits. The women came trailing after them, dragging striped canvas chairs which they placed in little groups along the lower half of the slope. From this vantage point, they could observe the children without imposing too obvious a supervision.

It was no accident that the project was laid out in such a way as to make possible this covert vigilance. In the brochure, delivered by special messenger to a selected few, Hamlin Town was described as "a community designed and managed with exclusive attention to the welfare and development of our young."

The entire area, about a half-mile square, was split by a broad tree-lined drive which wound gently upwards from the administration buildings to the white gate at the top of the hill. Detached as this gate was from any sort of fence or barrier, it served no practical purpose except to mark the upmost boundary of Hamlin. Beyond it lay a steep decline, littered with small boulders, which led into a densely wooded area.

Occasionally, a child wandered through the gate or past either side of it, and then, through a clever arrangement of wiring, a bell would set up a shrill clangour, and one of the women would run to fetch the wanderer back.

The houses were clustered halfway up the slope, on either side of the drive. Above these, the land was left free for a strategic placing of playgrounds, bicycle paths, and wide stretches of lawn.

The houses themselves were delightful. Low and rambling, their shingles were stained a silver grey—a charming background for the trellised roses which outlined each doorway. These roses bloomed all the year round, lending colour to every season. To the uninformed, the assortment of hues might seem a matter of chance or of calculated variety, but the inhabitants of Hamlin knew the significance of this apparently random selection.

Designed as the community was, for superior children, these roses were part of a careful scheme of identification. Each colour

A high, sweet voice took up the tune

cutting the air like a ribbon

represented the quotient scored by a child in the tests given previous to admittance to Hamlin. Red roses indicated the dwelling of a child whose rating might be termed astronomical, yellow was for those less high, and pink for those who, scoring lowest, still soared far above the average of the world outside.

Since each family had at least two, and more often three children—it was considered inadvisable to sponsor a family unit with only one child—each doorway bloomed with a profusion of colour. Here and there a trellis entirely yellow or pink appeared, but these were very few. The management of Hamlin had been engaged for some time in the development of a method for insuring trellises of a homogeneous appearance, preferably red, but even they acknowledged that this was a long-term endeavour. In the meantime, as Mr. Spinny the management representative jested, they were as gaudy as a carnival.

The Gliddon doorway presented an interesting variant. Ablaze with crimson ramblers of an intensity deeper than those of any other, it displayed also, nestling along one side, a few white buds. The reason for this was apparent in Sally, the elder of the two Gliddon children. Leona, the younger one, was of a potential so far beyond that of even the Hamlin children that the management had been persuaded to overlook the fact that Sally was a retarded child.

Such an exception had never been made before, but when it was determined that Sally's condition was the result of a car accident, and when the Board had viewed with amazement the results of Leona's tests, it was decided the risk was not too great.

There was no doubt that Leona was a remarkable child. Besides the evidence of the almost incredible quotient, she possessed a personal beauty that positively dazzled. Small, perfectly proportioned, she was more like an angel than an earthly child. In addition to these assets, she had an unusually lovely singing voice.

Poor Sally, on the other hand, was dark and awkward. Across her cheek ran a jagged purple scar, a memento of the accident, and one of her eyes had a tendency to turn inwards when she was at all tired or excited.

Her voice was hoarse, and she could only jabber unintelligibly or utter shrill, yelping sounds. If the children's play upset her,

Sally would glance about her dartingly, stamp her feet, and emit these almost animal noises. At such times, Mrs. Gliddon would take her into the house until she had calmed down. It was part of the understanding that Sally should never be permitted to interfere with the routines of the other children, and Mrs. Gliddon was most conscientious about adhering to this agreement.

Even Mr. Spinny was pleased with the success of the arrangement. He had himself entertained some doubt about the wisdom of admitting the Gliddons. If the place were to maintain its unique reputation, it was important that there be not the slightest letting down.

Until now he had discharged his duties with admirable assiduity and tact. When it turned out, as it had a few times, that the regular examinations indicated that a child who qualified on admittance had slipped back into the norm, Mr. Spinny arranged for a gradual withering of the roses about the family doorway. As a rule, the family, appreciative of the delicacy of this suggestion, departed quietly. Once in a great while, it became necessary to remove a trellis completely, but such unpleasant necessities were rare. The Board had cited Mr. Spinny twice for his commendable vigilance.

Now, however, the white buds about the Gliddon entrance were a reminder that he had, without the full permission of his conscience, abetted the Board in the infringement of its own rules. At first, he had some difficulty in reconciling himself to this defection, but later on, observing Leona's continued remarkableness and Mrs. Gliddon's clever management of Sally, Mr. Spinny was able to tell himself wholeheartedly that it was worth a Sally to have a Leona.

The advantages of Hamlin were immense. Everything was so carefully, so intelligently planned for the optimal development of the children that many of the parents found themselves hardly able to believe their luck.

Each morning the children were escorted to the special school behind the administration buildings. Here they received expert attention; instruction along the most progressive lines, with assiduous emphasis on the development of individual talents. They were returned home at noon, at which time they were served a hot lunch and put to bed. At three o'clock they emerged for an afternoon of free play. Until five this play took place under the deceptively casual eyes of their mothers. At that hour, the women having to go indoors to prepare the evening meal, a squad of trained watchers was sent out by the management. These watchers loitered unobtrusively among the children,

observing their actions and taking copious notes which they submitted in the form of a report once a month.

After supper the children read or played quiet games until eight o'clock, when it was required that they go to bed. From eight to eight-thirty, excerpts from the best classical music were piped into each child's bedroom, lulling the children to sleep. By special arrangement, Sally's room received only the simplest tunes, lest she become excited and disturb Leona's repose. As Mr. Spinny said paternally, "We can't have our Leona kept awake."

This use of the pronoun was indicative of the management's personal interest in every child in Hamlin. If a little girl's teeth cáme in crookedly, she was sent at the owners' expense to the best orthodontist in the country. The best children deserved the best treatment, Mr. Spinny pointed out. If, as a watcher occasionally reported, a child let fall information revealing a specific irregularity in his diet, the mothér received a pleasant little note reminding her that vitamin A is important to night vision, and enclosing several carrot recipes.

Even on so homely a detail as between-meal eating, the management was alert. The children were not encouraged to partake of odd-hour snacks, but every afternoon at three-thirty a Good Feelings wagon was admitted to the project. This hour was considered suitable in that it came shortly after the children's nap, when they were likely to be hungry, and far enough before the supper hour so that it would not dull their appetites.

The Good Feelings wagon was streamlined and gleaming white. The driver wore a starched, sterilised uniform, and was required to dip his fingers in alcohol at frequent intervals. As a result of this precaution, his hands were bright red and covered with powdery-looking scales. His ice-cream was tested daily, at the entrance to the project, for purity and vitamin content. Mr. Spinny himself supervised the analysis, and frequently demanded an increased percentage of butter fat or a lessening of artificial flavouring in the chocolate.

This visit of the Good Feelings wagon was the high point of the children's day, and vindicated the management's contention that children had certain universal requirements that must be satisfied to produce a balanced personality. Like the children in less privileged locales, the Hamlin children shouted joyfully when they heard the bell, and ran alongside the wagon holding out their coins and dancing with impatience. The mothers would watch fondly, smiling at their antics and even condoning the puppy-like pushing and shoving.

Sally was kept seated on the grass beside her mother's chair

because the jostling was likely to upset her, and Leona would buy Sally's ice-cream stick. She would tuck the paper napkin under her sister's chin and hand her the goody. "There, Sally," she would say, "enjoy yourself." Many a woman would feel tears rise to her eyes, at the gentleness of the tone.

One week, the Good Feelings man was ill, with a rash all over his body, induced by the frequent dippings in alcohol. The management distributed free ice-cream, but it was not the same, and the children's disappointment began to tell on the mothers. They would watch sadly as at three-thirty their little ones came to the kerb and cocked their heads hopefully, and a few of them remarked that the management might, just once, admit one of the strange wagons that roamed the highways.

The only one who did not seem particularly disturbed was Sally. She ate the free ice-cream with relish, dribbling some of it on to her chin, and Mrs. Gliddon wiped it off, sighing, "She doesn't even know—" Smacking her lips, Sally would squirm closer to her mother's legs and smile contentedly.

Then one afternoon the women heard music coming up the slope from the Good Feelings testing station. It was a strange tune, high and thin, and unlike any other they had heard. They looked at one another, puzzled, and walked over to the kerb, peering round the bend. Within a few moments a wagon came in sight, and the women laughed aloud in satisfaction. It was the Good Feelings wagon, but so changed and bedecked that the children would be doubly hilarious at its return. Mr. Spinny had outdone himself.

The wagon was drawn by a white horse which pranced and tossed its head like a circus pony. All along the horse's mane were brilliantly coloured crêpe-paper flowers which rustled in the breeze, and along its golden saddle were dozens of tiny bells which jingled musically. Above the wagon was stretched a crimson canopy, and from the fringes hung more bells; the wagon itself was decorated with gleaming, gaudy hieroglyphics.

As it came closer, the women exclaimed with astonishment at the change in the Good Feelings man. Before his illness he had been rather thin and, while always kindly, somewhat grave. Now, however, he had filled out in every direction, swelled his cheeks, his stomach, presenting an aspect of rosy jollity. He was playing a flute, and his ruddy cheeks were so puffed that his eyes appeared in tiny slits which sparkled mischievously. Instead of the starched white uniform, he was attired in a red waistcoat, yellow knickerbockers, and a pointed purple cap from whose peak dangled still more bells. The flute glinted in the sunlight, sending off rays which made the women blink.

Turning to rest their eyes, they saw a few of the children straggle over to the kerb, gazing curiously down the slope. In the forefront was Leona, her mouth half open, her eyes rapt. As the wagon drew closer, she turned and shouted something, and the other children came running, three and four at a time.

The Good Feelings wagon, jingling and flashing in the sun, came to a stop where the children had gathered, and the man flung his flute into the air, pirouetted, and caught it neatly. With joyful shrieks, the children began to clamber up the sides of the wagon, but the Good Feelings man raised his arms, and they fell back.

When they were all quiet, he began to sing in a strange tongue. The mothers looked at one another in some surprise, since Mr. Spinny had expressed himself often on the inadvisability of confronting the children with anything beyond their understanding. Oddly enough, however, the children seemed to know what the man was singing about. They nodded their heads with comprehension, and chattered excitedly. After a few minutes, the man stopped and bowed deeply to Leona who, without hesitation, took up the tune in a voice so high and sweet that it cut through the air like a ribbon. Then, flicking the reins so that the pony reared and tossed its gaily flowered mane, the Good Feelings man raised the flute to his lips and played again that first eerie tune. The wagon began to move slowly, and the children flocked after it in a great throng.

Watching, the women remarked that they had never seemed so many. They came from behind every tree and shrub to join the swelling stream, and made a breathtaking sight. Their voices rang like precious metal, and their hair, their clothing, took on an added brilliance.

When the wagon had attained the top of the hill, the Good Feelings man held out his hand to Leona, who leapt up lightly beside him, and handed her the flute, which she brandished above the children like a wand before she began to play. Poised on tiptoe, caught in the sun, she was purest glittering gold. Then the gate swung open, the wagon dipped below the hill, and with a great shout the children streamed after it.

For a moment the women were alarmed. A few of them began to run up the slope, but the others, more quickly rational, pulled them back. It was obvious, they argued, that this was all a treat arranged by Mr. Spinny. The wagon had come up from the testing station and, conclusively, the bell at the gate had set up no warning clangour. It would be a shame for them to spoil the celebration with stupid anxiety. Mr. Spinny himself, no doubt,

awaited, at the bottom of the hill. After a few minutes' discussion they dispatched one woman, securing a promise that she would reconnoitre silently, without making her presence known to the children.

While they waited, the mothers chatted happily, congratulating themselves anew on living in a place which compensated the children so lavishly for any disappointment, and reproaching themselves for their earlier implied criticism of Mr. Spinny. When they noticed that the children's voices could no longer be heard, that the project was, in fact, unusually still, they looked towards the top of the hill, shading their eyes with their hands. The woman who had gone ahead was standing with her back to them.

As they gazed, she turned and beckoned excitedly. Guessing that the children must be displayed in some panorama too charming to resist, they trailed up the slope, laughing softly, and motioning one another to be still.

When they were about two-thirds of the way up, they caught sight of Mr. Spinny running across the lawns, flapping his arms frantically and shouting in a squeaky, frightened voice. At the same moment the woman at the top slammed the white gate, and there was a burst of jangling sound—and silence.

Suddenly, the women understood. They began to run, pushing one another aside and panting hoarsely. Some of them were knocked down and scrambled to their feet again, their hair full of dust, and their dresses torn. They reached the top in little clusters. As each cluster attained the summit, it stood motionless, looking down the other side, and those behind redoubled their speed, not knowing what horror awaited them.

Mrs. Gliddon was last, having fallen twice. She had a bruise on her forehead, and in one hand she still clutched, senselessly, a few blades of grass.

The women stood transfixed. The hill dipped down into the woods, and there was no sign of the children or of the Good Feelings wagon. No echo of a voice or glint of hair came back to them.

Mr. Spinny came gasping up, still squeaking unintelligibly, and they turned on him like angry lions, demanding to know why he had admitted a Good Feelings man who would lead the children off into the woods.

Mr. Spinny caught his breath and said that he had done no such thing, that the Good Feelings man was at that very moment at home in his bed, driven out of his mind by an itching, scabrous rash, and that someone had been tampering with the wiring. Then the women screamed all at once, and ran stumbling down

the steep hill and into the woods, leaving Mr. Spinny to turn and walk off alone, stiff shouldered and jerky.

It was almost dark when the women came back. They marched dumbly out of the woods and up the far side of the hill, their eyes fixed straight ahead. At the top, they halted and looked down on Hamlin. In the half light, the roses were all grey. Someone had turned on the organ and the wiring had gone wrong, so that instead of playing in the bedrooms, the music reverberated through the streets and echoed from one house to the other. A little way down the slope, to one side, lay a child's shoe, white, with an ankle-strap.

The woman who was first picked it up and carried it dangling from her wrist like a bracelet. The others followed her down the drive walking two by two like convicts.

When they had all gone into their houses and closed the doors, someone must have phoned in about the organ, because the music stopped and everything was still.

After dark, a door opened, and Mrs. Gliddon crept out. She walked stealthily round the side of the house, humped over, snapping her fingers and hissing softly like someone calling a cat.

Sally crawled out from under a pile of leaves and stood up. The scar along her cheek was vivid in the moonlight. Her bad eye was turned all the way in, and her throat was knotted with the effort to speak.

"S-sh," said Mrs. Gliddon, laying her finger along her lips.

She held out her hand for Sally to take.

Sally strained. Her mouth opened.

"Pretty," said Sally, hoarsely. "Pretty."

She took Mrs. Gliddon's hand and went with her peaceably back into the house.

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A.B.C.

ABSURDITY, *n. A statement or belief manifestly inconsistent with one's own opinion.*

BRIDE, *n. A woman with a fine prospect of happiness behind her.*

CONVERSATION, *n. A fair for the display of the minor mental commodities, each exhibitor being too intent upon the arrangement of his own wares to observe those of his neighbour.*

AMBROSE BIERCE,
Devil's Dictionary

The Snow Goose—

The Small Miracle—

Flowers for Mrs. Harris—

and now a new winner,

the gayest of them all

Scruffy

THE telephone rang in the narrow, crowded office in the Old Queen's Gate Headquarters of the 3rd Coast Regiment, Royal Artillery, Gibraltar. It was a humid, hazy August morning. The flyblown calendar on the wall confirmed that it was the fifth day of the eighth month of the year 1939, and the dial of the wristwatch on the arm of the pleasant-looking young officer who emerged from a huge pile of documents littering his desk said that it was ten minutes past ten.

The officer, who was in shorts and open-necked khaki shirt, was of medium height, with a frank open face and a pair of gay blue eyes, which at times could reflect the most startling innocence, excitement, and enthusiasm.

He picked up the insistently shrilling instrument and said, " Captain Bailey speaking."

The voice at the other end of the line said, " Hullo, sir. Lovejoy here."

The Captain said somewhat testily, " Yes, yes, Lovejoy. What is it? " Ordinarily he would not have been so short with his right-hand man, the invaluable Gunner Lovejoy, Keeper of the Apes; but at that moment he was busy concocting an official letter which, when it reached its destination through all its official channels, he hoped would soften the heart of the Colonial Secretary

By

PAUL GALLICO

to the point where he would not only increase the amount of funds available for the daily food allowance for the Rock apes, but would also do something about the monkeynuts situation. They were out of monkeynuts on the Rock, and the price of them from both French and Spanish Africa had shot up beyond the Captain's budget.

The reason that this was a concern of Captain Timothy Bailey, Royal Artillery, was that in addition to his myriad other duties in connection with commanding anti-aircraft batteries, the job of Officer in Charge of Apes had been wished on him. This position carried with it no kudos, no perks, no medal at the end of it, not so much even as a " Well done! " from anyone.

From the point of view of Brigadier J. W. Gaskell, D.S.O., M.C., O.B.E., Captain Timothy Bailey had been the ideal choice. The young officer had a record of good conduct, respect for his superiors, no bad habits, and total absorption in the labours assigned to him. He appeared to have no time-wasting hobbies, to be of a serious turn of mind, and eager to please.

" Yes, yes, Lovejoy," repeated Captain Bailey. " What is it? " And then added, " Are you drunk or sober? "

" Sober, sir," reported Lovejoy, and from the earnestness and timbre of his voice, the Captain knew that this was so. " Sorry to disturb you, sir, but he's off again."

" Oh lord," groaned the Captain, " how long ago? "

" Half an hour."

" Why didn't you stop him? "

" I tried to, sir, but you know how he is."

" Then why didn't you call me earlier? "

" I couldn't, sir—I've just got back from first aid."

A throb of sympathy ran through Captain Bailey and softened his voice.

" Oh, I say—are you O.K.? "

" Yes, sir."

" Whereabouts? "

" The usual place, sir—the hand."

A proverb rose to the top of Captain Bailey's brain and went floating about there. It said, " Don't bite the hand that feeds you."

The point was that the ape, Harold, otherwise known as Scruffy, always did bite any hand that fed him. Yet somehow this managed

Gibraltar Disclaimer

Old Gibraltar hands will, no doubt, amuse themselves trying to identify the characters in this book and associate them with persons they have known. This pastime I must hasten to inform them and all others so disposed will be a waste of energy since never during the war was I within a thousand miles of Gibraltar.

It was therefore quite impossible for me to base any of these characters upon any persons dwelling, serving, or in office there at the time. If there is any resemblance to any such person it is entirely accidental and unintentional, as all characters, situations, and events in this story are fictitious.

There is only one demonstrable fact in this otherwise total work of fiction and that is that on the 25th August, 1944, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, caused a signal to be sent expressing his anxiety over disquieting rumours concerning the welfare of the Barbary apes in Gibraltar and the wish that they should not be allowed to die out. And on the 8th September of the same year a second directive to the effect that every effort should be made to restore the establishment of the apes to the number of twenty-four, and that this should be maintained thereafter.

So much for the truth. All that follows is nothing but the wildest imagination.

P. W. Gallico

to be a part of the perverted charm of the beast, and the spell he had contrived to cast over both of them.

" Poor old chap," Captain Bailey repeated. " Hadn't you better be having a drink? "

" I've been thinking about that, sir, but I thought it best to call you first."

" Quite right," Captain Bailey agreed. " Where are you ? "

" St. Michael's Hut. I came back here after the M.O. fixed me up. I thought perhaps the old bas— pardon me, sir—I mean, Scruffy might've come back. But he hasn't. I reckon he's well on his way now. You ought to be hearing from the C.R.A. within a couple of hours."

Captain Bailey said, " Blast! Well, thanks for warning me. By the way, what started him off this time? "

" Well, sir," explained the voice at the other end of the line, and Captain Bailey in his mind's eye could see Lovejoy scrunched up like a goblin in the narrow confines of St. Michael's Hut, the little gazebo not far from Prince Ferdinand's Battery where as a regular in charge of apes, a post he had filled with distinction for twenty years, Gunner Lovejoy from time to time worked far harder and longer and weirder hours than any of his colleagues in Anti-Aircraft Battery 5.

" Well, sir," Lovejoy said again, "you know how Scruffy is about his scoff—when he wants monkeynuts there's no two ways about it. It was carrots this morning. He takes one look at them, picks up the biggest, and lets go for me 'ead."

Captain Bailey's sporting sense momentarily got the better of him and he asked, " Did he hit you? "

Gunner Lovejoy replied with what almost amounted to pride, " He ain't never missed yet."

" Yes, of course," Captain Bailey said. " And then? "

" He knew I'd fetch 'im one on his ruddy ar— beg pardon, sir— I mean he knew I'd take measures if I caught him, so he called me a dirty name and went off down to the car park."

Captain Bailey shuddered and said, " Oh dear. Were there any cars there? "

Gunner Lovejoy said, " Yes, sir—three."

The Captain shuddered again and said, " Tourists? "

" Yes, sir."

" Well? "

" The usual, sir. He had the windscreen-wipers off quick as wink. You know he loves the rubber off'n them. Caviare, that's what it is to 'im."

" Yes, yes," the Captain assented, " I know. Any other damage?"

The Gunner's voice grew a shade less confident as it said, " I have the list 'ere, sir. Shall I read it out to you? "

A trifle wearily the Captain said, " Yes, I suppose you might as well."

He took a fresh sheet of notepaper and poised his pencil.

" Binoculars, one pair, Zeiss, size 8 × 14, value thirty-eight pounds, belonging to a gentleman named Schlummer staying at the Rock Hotel," the Gunner read off.

" What happened to 'em? " queried the Captain.

" Bunged them over the edge," replied Lovejoy. " There wouldn't be much left of them. The drop is seven hundred foot there."

" Go on," said the Captain.

" One camera, Ansco Reflex Automatic, three-five lens, fifteen unexposed films in magazine, value forty pounds, property likewise Mr. Schlummer."

" What happened to that? " asked the Captain.

" Same thing, sir."

"He didn't like this fellow, Schlummer, did he?" the Captain suggested.

"That's right, sir. You might almost say as what he 'ad a point there."

"German type. Is that the lot?"

"No no, sir," the Gunner replied cheerfully. "One hat, lady's, sir, with violets on, property of a Miss Sacking, staying at the Bristol, value three guineas."

"Good lord!" exclaimed the Captain. "What happened to that?"

"Tore it up, sir. He didn't like it. It wasn't all that bad."

"Yes. Go on."

"One teddy bear, child's toy, property of Master Leonard Sletch, father and mother Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Sletch, at Hotel Victoria. Damages claimed to value of—"

The Captain interrupted with a bitter laugh. "That one at least oughtn't to cost much."

There was a moment's silence from the other end of the telephone, and then Lovejoy said, "Well, you see, the trouble was, sir, the kid wouldn't let go of it."

"Oh lord," breathed Captain Bailey, "don't tell me—?"

"Yes, sir, he did. But the medical officer's fixed the kid up, and he'll be all right."

A sudden wave of anger passed over Tim and he shouted into the telephone, "Dammitall, Lovejoy, what the devil were you doing all this time? Didn't you have any balloons on you?"

"No, sir—sorry. Not a one on me person. You know how it is with the budget, sir."

"Damn and blast the budget!" Tim shouted. "If you'd come and told me you hadn't any, I'd have bought you some out of my own pocket. We can't have this sort of thing going on."

Scruffy, who feared nothing living on earth—not man nor beast, not lightning, thunder, hell, or high water—was subject to the thrall of but one thing, a child's toy rubber balloon.

It reduced Scruffy temporarily to a wretched, cowering, quivering, panic-stricken mass of fur. In this state he could be handled, and remained tractable for a period of twenty-four hours.

This was a secret shared between Tim Bailey and Gunner Lovejoy.

Lovejoy repeated, "Sorry, sir."

"What started him off after that?" demanded Tim. "I should have thought he'd had a lovely morning. Pleased as Punch. Cost the Government over a hundred quid. I'd say he could have retired on that. You say he's off to town? Why?"

The Gunner said, "He caught a look at hisself in the wing-mirror of one of the cars, sir."

It was now the Captain's turn to fall silent for a moment at his end of the telephone. Then, in a more subdued voice, he said, "Oh."

"You know how that sets 'im off, sir," the Gunner was saying,

his voice suddenly smarmy with sharing a confidence. " He hates the sight of hisself. He hates me, he hates you, he hates everybody, but worst of all he seems to hate hisself."

" Did he break it off? " Tim asked.

" He broke them *all* off," amended the Gunner. " Six! They were the several properties of Mr. and Mrs.—"

" All right, all right, never mind. You can give me those later. Anyway, thanks for letting me know."

The Gunner said, " If you should be needing me later, sir, I'll be—"

" In the Admiral Nelson," the Captain concluded for him. And then added almost absentmindedly, " Have one for me too," and hung up.

He sat there for a moment looking down upon the list of destruction, and knew that, with Scruffy on the loose and headed for town, this was just the beginning. Yet somehow there was really no anger in his heart against the animal, and actually the beginning of a smile was fighting its way to the corners of his mouth. He then looked at his own thumbs, one of which bore one, and the other two, whitening cicatrices, mementoes of Harold—Scruffy. The smile did not disappear; in fact it settled there, for the truth was that deep down in his heart of hearts Captain Timothy Bailey had a sneaking affection for the brute; he was so damnably and magnificently consistent, and unregeneratedly naughty.

Scruffy—largest, oldest, toughest, and most disagreeable Barbary ape inhabiting Gibraltar—was making his way down to the town via the remains of that spine of stone and brickwork known as King Charles V wall. The ruins climbed straight up from below, almost like a ladder, constituting a convenient short cut for the ape population when they decided to pay a visit to the city in search of goodies and entertainment. In this instance, Scruffy was both hungry and bored as well as irritated.

Scruffy was one of the ugliest specimens of magot, scientifically known as Macaca Silvana Simia, the African tailless Macaque, or Barbary ape, ever domiciled on the Rock, and likewise one of the largest specimens. He was the size of a fullgrown boxer dog, but twice as strong and ten times as destructive, his fur greyish-reddish brown, the hair rather thick and somewhat wavy. His black face was illuminated by a pair of golden brown eyes brimming with meanness and shining forth malevolently from beneath cavernous brows. Large tufts of hair stood up from his ears. He was pure monkey, and yet he contrived likewise to look like a lot of people one knew and disliked.

Scruffy's body was thickset, his hindquarters heavy, so that at times he resembled a fat Arctic explorer in a fur suit several sizes too large for him. He had a set of murderous canine teeth, a jaw like a steel trap, and was further armed with ten strong nails set into black paws at the end of powerful and muscular arms.

He was grumpy, wary, unfriendly, suspicious, irritable, bad

tempered, and vengeful. He was wily as a Red Indian, as treacherous as a snake, and withal brave. He was one four-footed mass of animated vices, unleavened by a single thing that a human might consider a virtue—unless the humans were a pair of odd ones like Gunner John Lovejoy and Captain Timothy Bailey. Each loved and admired Scruffy in his own way, and for his own reasons; the former because he recognised the monkey in rebellion against a world in which he had not asked to be put, and because he felt, without knowing it, the tragedy of the basic loneliness of the animal.

Scruffy's first port of call was at a backstreet behind Prince Edward Road, where the wall came to an end. Here he made his way to the red tiled roof of a small cottage and for a few moments sat scratching himself contemplatively and letting ideas float up into his head.

It is the considered opinion of zoologists, anthropologists, and scientists that primates cannot and do not think, though they would have encountered a stiff argument from Gunner Lovejoy and Captain Bailey on the subject, for obviously some mental process must be involved when a beast who has been sitting comfortably pleasuring his nerves by scratching itches, suddenly ceases and commences to de-tile a roof.

The scientists are insistent that primates are neither able to go back into the past beyond remembering perhaps where food was accustomed to be buried during a series of experiments, nor project themselves into the future, such as deciding, "I think if the weather is fine tomorrow I'll go down to town, but if it's raining I'll stay home and let Annette, my favourite female, get on with a bit of grooming up my fur."

There then remains the present, and if Scruffy was denied the past and anticipating the future, his evil mind was a whizzer when it came to deciding what he would do now, or at any given instant. Thus his wicked, intelligent eyes coming to rest upon the tiling of the roof noted one that was slightly damaged and loose. At once his prying fingers completed the job, and quite naturally loosened the one next to it.

Scruffy had a dozen off before the householder, hearing the noise, came forth and began jumping up and down with rage and shouting in Gibraltese Spanish. Since the householder was down on the street level and Scruffy was up out of his reach, the shouts of anger were no concern of his, except to arouse in him a feeling of satisfaction, but he now discovered that the flat roofing tiles when thrown sailed beautifully, almost like the flight of those wretched creatures, birds.

Scruffy now filled the air with whizzing red tile-birds, and when one crashed into a wall and splintered it gave him another idea. Below him and a little to the right, mounted on a black-and-white pole, was the attractive glass globe of a street lamp.

It took him three tile-birds to get the range and the hang of it,

and then he sent the fourth crashing deliciously through it, shattering the globe into a thousand pieces.

Two of those thin Gibraltar policemen arrived, their narrow, sallow, Spanish features and figures looking, as usual, out of place in the costume of the London bobby, rather as though they had been caught coming home in daylight from a fancy dress ball. They were understandably and righteously wroth at this destruction of public property, drew batons and prepared to mount to the roof and do something about the situation.

Again proving that when it came to the present Scruffy had all his mental buttons, he now decided that there had been sufficient entertainment for a first stop; and with a leap, a bound, a hop, and a swing of his strong arms, and in spite of having to do without the assistance that every other monkey could claim, a fifth limb in the shape of a tail, Scruffy was three telegraph poles and five houses away from the scene.

The policemen made a note of damages, and called their Sergeant. The Sergeant notified the Lieutenant, who had a word with the Inspector, who picked up the phone and dialled Fortress Headquarters to ask for a word with the Brigadier. . .

The Chaplain to the Brigade of Royal Artillery stationed in Gibraltar, probably because of the nature of his calling, had been awarded quarters in a charming cottage not far from the French Consulate, in a grove of pepper and eucalyptus trees, but his pride and joy was his vegetable garden.

Scruffy had never been in that direction before, and so he did not know of this paradise. Whim, fancy, and luck took him thither on that wonderful day, and it was like a starving man who finds himself suddenly seated at a Lucullan banquet and bidden to eat his fill. Nobody had bade Scruffy, but this was beside the point.

When the Chaplain, finally roused from labours in his study by noises off, went out and stared aghast at his garden, it was all over. The tomato vines were down, the fruit trampled to a pulp, beans and peas were uprooted, ravished leeks strewed the ground, the tops had been torn off the carrots, tender courgettes shattered, the grape arbour denuded, and the place left a shambles. He was just in time to see the greyish-brown rear end of the depredator retire into a tree. When the Chaplain approached the tree, Scruffy spat out a mouthful at him and departed on his way to another part of the town.

He paused for an instant to catch his breath and rest himself in the orange tree in the lovely floral glade surrounding the Garrison Library building. For the moment he had neither mischief nor gluttony on his mind, but unfortunately the librarian had no way of knowing this. He saw only the largest and ugliest of the magots which an inscrutable Government insisted upon fostering on the Rock perched in his tree. No diplomat, and certainly no connoisseur of the vagaries of macaca silvana simia, the librarian picked up a large smooth pebble from his gravel walk and shied it at the ape.

Thinking-apparatus or none, one thing that Scruffy could get

was an idea when it was presented to him. He therefore deliberately and methodically detached each orange from its stem and fired it at the head of the librarian. After three direct hits, the unhappy custodian of Gibraltar's culture retreated into the library. Scruffy raised his sights and continued the bombardment, splattering the fruit up against the doors and windows of the building. When there were no more oranges on the tree he continued on his way, feeling rested and refreshed by the incident. The librarian made for the telephone.

The Surveyor attached to the Colonial Secretary's Office lived in a neat two-storey house not far from Ragged Staff Gates. It being then eleven o'clock of the morning of a working day, the Surveyor was out dutifully surveying, and Mrs. Surveyor was out shopping. Like a good and careful housewife she had locked the front door and the back door, and closed the ground-floor windows. However, a window in the second storey was open to admit fresh air into the bedroom.

If there was anything Scruffy loved, it was an inside job. On his roof-top way across town to turn more of the unimaginable future into the delectable present, the open window beckoned him like a lodestone. He went down the drainpipe, pausing only a moment to detach a loose piece of the gutter and throw it down into the street, and then entered the Surveyor's bedroom. The bed looked inviting, so he got into it, uncovering in the process the Surveyor's red-and-white striped flannel pyjamas, the design and colour of which irritated Scruffy, so he shredded them and threw the remains out of the window.

Encountering his ugly mug in the mirror of Madame Surveyor's dressing-table, he was reduced to the usual state of fury, and picking up a chair whanged it into the mirror thus causing himself to disappear. This may not have been a feat of memory, but it was certainly practical.

He went sniffing through the dressing-table, opened a bottle of expensive scent and drank the contents, spilt powder and got it all over his face and up his nose, bringing on a sneezing fit. The ticking of an ormolu bedroom clock annoyed him, so he stopped it the only way he knew how—by pounding it on the floor until its innards came out.

He then turned his attention to the cupboards, which he opened. The clothing that disturbed him either by its texture or colour he rendered into strips, but for some reason fell in love with a pair of the Surveyor's checked golfing trousers. These he flung over his shoulder and went to the window just as the Surveyor's wife, returning from shopping with her baskets laden, looked up to see a brown-furred, whitefaced fiend from hell with her husband's golfing trousers wrapped round his neck staring at her.

The scream she emitted was heard at the dockyards a mile away.

Scruffy retired from the scene the same way he had come—up the rainspout and over the roofs—still bearing the trousers.

Shaking, the Surveyor's wife went into the house and called the

Colonial Secretary's secretary and dusted him off on the subject of the famous Rock apes. The buck then passed from one telephone to another until it ended in the lap of the Colonial Secretary himself, who said bitterly to his assistant, " When you can get through to Brigadier Gaskell, call me—and don't stop trying until you do."

Since all of his telephone lines were still tied up, the Brigadier summoned his Staff Captain and snarled, " Get over to Old Queen's Gate HQ and find young Bailey. I want him brought here immediately." Unspoken but implicit in the glare of the Brigadier's eyes and the choleric crimson of his countenance was the phrase, " Dead or alive."

The Brigadier was a tall, florid man, whose mouth beneath a short military moustache was set in lines of permanent exasperation engendered by having to deal with young officers and rankers sent out these days who were simply not a patch on what soldiers had been in his own youth.

Trouble was what Brigadier Gaskell hated, personal trouble, military trouble, trouble with superiors, trouble with inferiors, trouble at home, trouble on the post, and above all trouble with politicians, civil servants, and civilians. Trouble was what he had on his hands now, trouble which would have repercussions quite possibly in the office of the Colonial Secretary, the Governor, and Whitehall, and which could have been avoided if a young nitwit of a Captain delegated to do the job had discharged his duties properly and kept his filthy beasts up at Queen's Gate and Middle Hill where they belonged, instead of pestering him with requests for cages, sprays, concrete floorings, increase in food allowances, and other damned coddlings of the foul creatures.

Well, young Bailey was for it now, and Brigadier Gaskell, who had somewhat more imagination than is usually associated with a soldier, relished the state that Captain Bailey would be in as Captain Quennel, his Staff Captain, marched him over to receive his chewing up. He would know that he was for the daddy of all rockets.

Thus the C.R.A. was totally unprepared for the bustling, eager entrance of this officer, the engaging and friendly innocence of his blue eyes, and the unsettling expression of pleasure and enthusiasm on his countenance. He had under his arm a large manila file, apparently filled with documents, and as he came through the door his fingers were already delving into it and bringing forth type-written sheets and other pages covered with what appeared to be rough drawings and figures.

So startled was the Brigadier by this breezy and whirlwind entrance, when his imagination had promised him a pale and shaking creature standing craven and trembling on the carpet, that he failed immediately to touch off the blast as he had intended, with the crash of his fist on to his desk and a shout of, " God damn it, Bailey, once and for all . . ."

Instead he took the Captain's crisply delivered salute and remained seated behind his desk staring openmouthed and unbelieving, listening to him say, " It's frightfully decent of you to give me this time, sir. I know how busy you are, but I've got everything in shape, I think, so that you can practically take it in at a glance."

The papers were out of the file and spread on the desk before him, and in spite of what was pent up inside, the Brigadier could not help but find his fire-and-brimstone-shouting glance momentarily distracted to them, so that at one instant he found himself staring at what seemed to be a drawing of a large and primitive bear-trap, the next at a list of names—Joyce, Mary, Helen, Phyllis, Peter, Albert, Harold, Marjorie, Daisy, Penelope, Oswald, Jeremiah—then again more drawings which looked like refrigerator-coils, and other sheets drawn up most intriguingly in the form recognised as used for genealogies and lines of descent from ancient families.

Staff Captain Quennel found himself staring down at the papers too, thus unwittingly drawing upon himself the explosion the C.R.A. had been saving up for the Captain.

" What the devil are you standing there gazing at, Quennel? " he shouted, causing the Staff Captain to pale beneath his tan.

Tim, who had produced a pencil, now pointed with it to one of the drawings and said, " I think probably my trap, sir. The way it works, sir, is—you put the banana here, with a nylon thread attached to it."

The Brigadier was beginning to recover his lost poise and said with a cold and repressed menace, " Captain Bailey, do you realise—? "

" I know it isn't exactly sporting, sir," Captain Bailey continued, " but he picks up the banana, pulling the thread which is tied to this support, here, dragging it out from under; down comes the cage and there you are."

" *Captain Bailey!* " At last the C.R.A. had gathered his forces for the shout he had meant to emit at the very first. " Do you realise why I have sent for you? "

Tim did, and wondered how long he could continue to conceal the fact from the Brigadier. It had worked well so far, and was quite probably worth another try, but he also knew that there was such a thing as goading a man beyond the limits of containment. He said, " Yes, sir: to go over the things that need to be done for the apes."

Brigadier Gaskell's fists clenched and unclenched. Then he said, " Do you see that telephone, Captain Bailey? "

" Yes, sir."

" Do you know that that telephone has been ringing constantly for the last two hours? "

" No, sir."

" Well, it has. And during those two hours I have been compelled to listen to a list of complaints of depredations by a filthy brute that it is supposed to be your responsibility to keep under control: gardens torn up, orange trees knocked down, gutters demolished,

roofs torn off houses, the Surveyor's trousers—" There was a slight movement on the part of the Staff Captain, and the Brigadier's fury was again distracted to that unfortunate young man. " Captain Quennel," he said icily, " if you laugh, you may consider your military career at an end." He returned to Tim. " Homes invaded—I'm surprised there's anything of the town left standing."

Tim's voice suddenly went low and was filled with sympathy. He said, " I know, sir, and that's not all."

" W–what? " The Brigadier here found his mind and senses reeling. " W–what's not all? "

" Of what's happened," Tim explained. " Gunner Lovejoy is bringing down the list of claims. The chap who had his camera and binoculars smashed had obviously been teasing the animal. I think we can deal with him, sir. As for the child that was bitten—"

" Child that was bitten? " repeated the Brigadier in tones of mingled fury, despair, and disbelief.

" If he had used his nut and let go the teddy bear, it wouldn't have occurred." Tim's voice suddenly grew confiding and conciliatory. " The whole thing wouldn't have happened, sir, if some attention had been paid to my memo of ten days ago on the peanut situation. It all ties in with what I had to say about the shocking lack of monkeynuts. You see, he does like his peanuts, and I think if you will consult the order issued on March 28th, 1932, by the Secretariat on behalf of the Government, you will find he is entitled to them as a part of the regular rations."

The Brigadier took a long deep breath, and then two more, since murder was not his idea of bringing to a close an honourable, if undistinguished, military career. Then he said, " Captain Bailey, am I to understand that you are presuming to offer me advice? "

" No, sir. Except, of course, where the apes are concerned—"

" You know it all."

Tim tried to look modest. " Well, sir, I have made a study of the job since I took it over a year or so ago, and I must say I've learnt a good deal."

" Bailey," the Brigadier asked with almost an air of amiability, " do you know why I put you into the job of Officer in Charge of Apes? "

Tim was always one to repay amiability with the like. " Well, no, sir," he said with what he hoped was an agreeable expression, " not really."

" I selected you," interrupted the Brigadier, and then pronounced each word of the following sentence separately, " because—I—didn't—want—any—trouble."

" Trouble, sir? "

" Trouble! Trouble with those seeping apes. Bailey, you may or may not realise it, but this is a military outpost of the Empire. I have things to do, Bailey. You may be too young to realise it, but the command of a Brigade of Royal Artillery is complicated and arduous. For God knows why the Government has seen fit

to encumber me with the further responsibility of a pack of toul and undisciplined monkeys. I am to keep track of their numbers, look after their welfare, write reports, and otherwise waste my time on this pack of repulsive slobs."

Tim thought it wise to remain silent at this point, and he did so.

"That same Government in its benevolence," continued the Brigadier, "has seen fit to permit me to delegate authority by appointing an OIC, or Officer in Charge of Apes." The Brigadier's fists suddenly clenched again, his jaw muscles tightened, and he hissed, "That's you, Bailey, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed, sir, and I've tried—"

The Brigadier said grimly, "One of the things we expect from our young officers is initiative. Well, and what did I get?"

"Well, if I may say so, sir," began Tim, and could not keep his eyes from looking in the direction of the papers he had laid out on the Brigadier's desk.

Crash went the Brigadier's fist on them. "Bumph!" he shouted. "Bloody, all-fired, eternal bumph! You've buried me in bumph. Every time I come to my desk in the morning there's some bumph from you suggesting this, suggesting that, demanding this, that, or the other, using me as a messenger boy or postal station to pass along your nonsensical notions to the Colonial Secretary or the Governor, filling my head that ought to be kept clear for the men of my Brigade with monkeynuts, oatmeal, carrots, onions, or whatever you're trying to cadge, concreting of shelters, building of cages, installation of salt water system for cleaning and cooling of cages, reduction of rat colony."

He interrupted his list with another violent bang of his fist. "God damn it, if you want to reduce the rat colony, why don't you get a pea-shooter and go out and do it yourself? Do you want to see what I've had to put up with since you took over, Captain Bailey?" He pressed a button, and when the Senior Warrant Officer appeared, said, "Get me Captain Bailey's file, and Major Patterson's too, while you're at it."

The chief clerk returned carrying a stack of six bulging manila envelopes, and one small thin one, which he deposited side by side on the Brigadier's desk.

"Look at that, Bailey," the Brigadier said. He picked up the thin envelope and said, "Why the devil can't you be like your predecessor, Major Patterson? There you are; two reports a year: so many born, so many died, to hell with them, and there's an end to it."

Tim looked down with distaste at his predecessor's file. "He didn't love them, sir," he said. "What I found out was: it isn't just a tally job. They need love and attention. You see, in a way, they're sort of like us."

The Brigadier's absent temper returned again. "What's that?" he yelled. "Are you trying to tell me that—?" He shut off what would have been Tim's elucidation with another crash of his fist. "Do you know what's been the matter with those animals since

you've taken over? They're filthy, rotten spoilt, that's what they are."

Here he came to the point he had really been meaning to make, and jabbed a finger at Tim. " Let me tell you something, young man," he said, " the Colonial Secretary is sick and tired of you and your bumph, the Governor is sick and tired of you and your bumph, and "—crash—" most important, I am sick and tired of it.

" And now I'll tell you what we're going to do. First of all we'll cut out the bumph. I don't want to see another communication from you for the next six weeks. Then you keep that confounded ape out of this town. The next time he comes down, I'll shoot him myself. And just to help you along and fire you with diligence and enthusiasm, hereafter all damage to personal property perpetrated by any of your bloody monkeys comes out of your pay. Thank you, Captain Bailey, that will be all."

Somehow Tim found himself headed for the door.

" And take this bumph with you," the Brigadier shouted.

Tim went back, collected it, stuffed it into his file, saluted without really having his heart in it, and went out. There was no enthusiasm left in him. For the first time he felt genuinely crushed.

Young Captain Bailey stood leaning on the rail and looking out over the town shimmering in the summer heat haze. He became aware of a slight movement next to him, turned and saw the object of his deliberations seated on a rock nearby regarding him malevolently.

" Oh, it's you, you clot," said Captain Bailey, for at that moment his thoughts had managed to put him out of sorts with the beast who was messing up his plans to create the best of all possible worlds for the worst of all possible monkeys. " Why the hell don't you behave yourself? Don't you realise you're spoiling it for everyone? What I ought to do is catch you and give you a damn good hiding."

Scruffy said nothing, but kept regarding Tim balefully. As always, the concentrated fury and hatred in Scruffy's eyes moved Tim to do something to win him. He reached into a side pocket and produced a peanut, a small supply of which he always carried, held it up and said, " All right then, come over here and have one on me."

The animal lifted his head slightly to make sure what it was Tim was holding out to him, then rose, and with deliberation marched over to Tim on all fours, reached up with his left paw and took the peanut. With his right paw he seized hold of Tim's wrist and quietly and firmly bit him in the hand. The blood spurted forth; Scruffy gave a tremendous leap which moved him ten yards away, where he turned his immediate attention to the monkeynut.

Tim let out a yell and a rich Army curse which was topped by a feminine scream. " Oh, the nasty thing! I saw him do it."

Startled, Tim looked up and saw a small car drawn up by the concrete platform, with a fat girl at the wheel

She wasn't really stout, Tim observed upon second glance, but only rather plump, as though the baby fat had not yet entirely been melted away. The tanned arms at the steering-wheel had dimples at both the elbows and the wrists and there was somewhat too much flesh on the oval of her face. Tim's thought was that if she were to thin down she might possibly be quite good looking. Even so, he was struck by the clarity and brilliance of her eyes which were the colour of aquamarine, and were now filled with sympathy. The roundness of her face made her nose seem slightly too small, if delectable, but the mouth was firm and full of character. All this was surmounted by a twist of short-cut unruly hair the colour of wild honey.

" Oh," said Tim, " I didn't know—I do beg your pardon."

" That's quite all right," said the girl, and hers was a soft voice that fell pleasantly upon the ears. " I should have said worse myself. He did it deliberately. Why don't you go and give him a kick? "

It was almost automatic for Tim to spring to Scruffy's defence. He said, " It wasn't his fault."

The girl said severely, " Oh yes it was. He planned it. I saw him making up his mind to do it two minutes ago. Look at your poor hand."

Tim did. His life's gore was welling from two holes and dripping to the ground.

" Shall I do it up for you? " she asked.

Tim felt embarrassed at having a fuss made over him. " It's all right," he said. " It's nothing. It stops after a bit."

Ten yards away Scruffy was jumping up and down on all fours and coughing, which meant that he was delighted with what he had accomplished and felt he ought to be rewarded with more monkeynuts. So habitual was the performance that before Tim knew what he was doing, he plunged his uninjured hand into his pocket, withdrew a half-dozen or so nuts and threw them to the ape, who collected them and bared his fangs once more.

" Oh, you men! " said the girl, and got out of her car, opening her handbag and shaking her head. She produced a clean handkerchief and said, " I do it very well. I've had first aid training. And then you ought to have it cauterised. I'm sure that thing is poisonous."

As she came over, Tim thought she must be twenty-one or two. A girl that old ought not to be quite so chubby, and yet once one had been caught up in her eyes it did not seem to matter—in fact, one quite forgot everything else, everything except, of course, one's problems. Her touch was gentle, her hair and clothes smelled of fresh air and sunlight. She wiped away the blood, examined the two holes with clinical and enthusiastic interest, and then deftly and efficiently bound his wounds.

" There," said the girl. " Now—" and she motioned with a bob of her sunny head in the direction of Scruffy, who was gorging himself—" aren't you going to do anything about him? "

" No," Tim replied. " Thank you." And then suddenly, as a wholly new idea came in answer to this question of Scruffy's behaviour which had so long been plaguing him, he said, " I say, do you know what? I've just had a thought—do you suppose it could be because he hasn't any tail? "

This query, if one wanted to make something out of it, could go to show how a single sentence carelessly uttered can sometimes change entire lives, and even the course of history, for the young girl had already begun to wend her way back to her vehicle, convinced that there was no present, and certainly no future, in any young man so tame and spiritless as to let himself be shredded by an ungrateful beast upon whom he had just conferred a favour, without offering so much as a cuff, pinch, or tweak in retaliation. He had seemed a nice-looking boy, but she was not in the habit of collecting saints. However, his remark stopped her in mid air, so to speak, with her foot on the running-board. " What? " she said. " Because who hasn't got a tail? "

" Old Scruff over there. By jove, do you know, I think I've got it."

She came walking back slowly. " Hasn't he one? " she asked. " I hadn't noticed."

Tim said, " No? I'll show you." He then called out, " Hoy, Scruffy. Come here, old boy," knowing full well that the animal would do just the opposite, which indeed he did, turning his back at the summons and elevating his buttocks into their faces.

" There you are," said Tim.

" I don't see what that has to do with it," the girl said, " or why it should make him bite you just after you had presented him with a lovely monkeynut."

Tim already saw himself preparing a monograph upon the subject and submitting it to the Zoological Society and being possibly rewarded with an F.Z.S. after his name. " Frustration," he said. " Disappointment. Frightful feeling of inferiority. Not one thing or the other, don't you see. Social and physical liability. Bound to prey on his mind and cause him to have a bilious outlook on the world. Every other monkey has a tail. Uses it to swing from or pick up small objects. Rounds him out. Dogs have tails; cats have tails—and here's poor old Scruff going around without one. Debasing and humiliating. The kind of thing you can't get away from. Always imagining people are talking behind their hands even when they're not."

It was not so much the theory as the earnestness and satisfaction of the young man with his idea which now began to interest the girl. She had returned all the way from her car and now stood beside him, not quite reaching up to his shoulder, and looking at Scruffy who, having shown his contempt for them, had now reversed his position and was sitting with his canines bared.

" How did he lose it? " she asked. " Caught it in a door, or did someone cut it off to get even? "

" No no, of course not. He simply hasn't got one; none of them

have. It's that kind of monkey. They are known as Macaques, but those are the only tailless ones."

The girl frowned in slight bewilderment. "You mean, none of them have any tails? Are they all then as nasty as that one?"

"Oh no," said Tim, again swift to spring to the defence of his charge, "only old Scruff there is something special in that department."

A look of triumph fired the charmingly chubby countenance of the girl. "Oh-ho," she cried, "so then it's not because he hasn't a tail. If the others haven't got one either and are sweet about it, it's just because he's a nasty, surly, bad-tempered, mean old—"

She stopped suddenly in mid description. "Oh dear," the girl continued in genuine sympathy and contrition. "I've spoilt your perfectly beautiful idea, haven't I?"

"That's quite all right," Tim said, even though his F.Z.S. had gone a-glimmering.

"Oh dear," the girl repeated, "you care about him, don't you?"

Tim nodded and said, "One can't help it. He's so extraordinarily and consistently wicked. It's something like having a very naughty child: you feel that somewhere there must be a little bit of good in it, if only you could get at it. Nothing on this earth ought to be that absolutely and completely useless and destructive. There must be some reason."

The girl shook her head slowly and said, "He's just plain bad."

A female ape appeared out of a tree with an apelet clinging to her back. Scruffy gave a cough of rage and let fly a cuff that swept the apelet off the mother's back and into the dust of the road. He then took a bite at the female's flank, sending her shrieking down the road.

The girl watched the performance with her grave eyes and murmured, "Sweet."

Tim said, "He's never cared for her a great deal."

The girl asked, "Do you come up here often to visit him?"

Tim replied, "Well—yes, in a way. You see, I'm Officer in Charge. I'm OIC Apes."

The girl now turned her gaze upon him in full astonishment and said, "I beg your pardon. You're what?"

Tim said, "Officer in Charge of Apes. Forgive me, I should have introduced myself—and you've been so kind. My name is Tim Bailey."

The girl was still regarding him with utter disbelief and amazement. She said, "Do you mean to tell me that the Royal Artillery actually appoints a Captain on active service to a post called Officer of Apes?"

Tim bristled perceptibly. "I do. The care of the Barbary apes of Gibraltar has been a tradition of the Royal Artillery for years."

Again a wave of contrition and extraordinary tenderness came into the face of the girl. "Oh dear, I *am* sorry. I didn't mean—Of course. But you see, I didn't know. We're Navy. I mean, I've

just come out here to join my parents." And she repeated again, "Oh dear, I am making such a muddle of this. I've hurt your feelings, and I didn't mean to. I'm Felicity French. We live at the Mount—and after you've been so sweet about that nasty—I mean, your friend. Do forgive me."

"Please, please," Tim said, "that's quite all right. I assure you I don't mind a bit. Quite a few people think it's odd." In his mind a brief addition of two and two making four had taken place: the Mount and the name of French, and the fact that he was conversing, obviously, with the daughter of Admiral Sir Richard French, Flag Officer, and Second-in-Command of the Rock. He turned to her suddenly as a new idea entered his head and asked, "Had you ever thought what it must be like to be a monkey—I mean chaps like these who live where there are people?"

Felicity replied, "No, I hadn't." She went over and sat on the rail. Scruffy, having finished his peanuts, loped off; the mother ape returned, presented her rear end to her offspring, who climbed aboard her back and clung to her.

"There you are," said Tim. "What kind of a future is there in store for that little thing?" He went over to it, plucked it from its mother's back and let it hang from one of his fingers. He said, "That's the girl, Adele; show the lady some of your tricks." He placed the apelet on to his palm, where she did a neat handstand.

Felicity applauded. "Oh, good!" And then asked, "Do they all have names?"

"Of course," Tim replied. "I name them when they're six months old and it looks as though they're going to make it. But there again you have it. What's the good of having a name if you can't make use of it, like signing cheques or writing to your pals? What's this little creature got to look forward to but being bitten to pieces in a fight, or dying of pneumonia when a levanter moves in? That's the kind of thing I'm trying to stop."

"Tell me about it," Felicity said, and knew not what she did.

Tim looked at her swiftly for an instant to see whether she was serious or having a pull at his leg, for recently everyone had been avoiding him. "Do you really mean it?"

Felicity said, "Yes, please," and now suspected that she might be in for something of a session. "You wouldn't have a cigarette on you, would you?"

"Yes, of course. How very rude of me." He offered her one from his case and lit it. She inhaled the smoke gratefully, folded her hands, and waited.

After a moment's mental floundering, Tim said, "You see, they're all so lonely. Even though they have their own friends and families here, they're lonely inside, and disappointed. It's as though whoever made us had tried things out with them first and then cast them aside. But there they are."

And from this earnest beginning he launched into the full narrative of his arrival on the Rock, his being made OIC, and his

suddenly awakened interest in the Barbary apes entrusted to his care.

He talked and talked and talked, did Captain Bailey, the story, for the first time falling upon willing ears, pouring from him in a seemingly endless torrent. Felicity listened without interruption, smoking quietly and never seeming to take her grave, sweet eyes from his face. Much of what he was saying was unintelligible to her—statistics and logistics, measurements and complicated mechanical devices for protecting and controlling the apes—but through the story that he told, somehow never involving himself or his disappointments directly, there emerged the picture of a good, kind, and loving man in whose make-up there appeared more than the usual shred of tenderness and gentleness allotted to men, and concern for fellow creatures on the earth other than himself and his kind. And this picture went straight to the heart of Felicity and touched her.

Tim talked on. He told her about Lovejoy, the stickiness of bureaucracy, its sole concern with statistics and entries on the right side of the ledger, and the difficulty of getting the Brigadier to see or even consider the human—or rather, the animal—side of the question, concluding with, " I suppose the Brig. has got more to worry about than monkeys, and old Scruff did tear up the town. Wait until the C.R.A. gets the list of damage he did up here before starting below."

Tim ran down a bit at that point, and in the hiatus Felicity said firmly, " I think he's horrid. You're not appreciated."

" Oh, it isn't that," Tim said. " I don't mind—I've never had quite so much fun or been so interested in anything—it's for *them*, don't you see, that I get discouraged and a little low sometimes. Nobody seems to care about them really but Gunner Lovejoy and myself."

" I do! " Felicity heard herself cry with a fierceness that astonished her. " I do now since you've told me about them. I think they're sweet." She was rewarded by a look of gratitude and worship combined that poured from Tim's eyes. " And you're not to become discouraged," Felicity added firmly.

She looked at her watch and said, " Goodness, I've kept you too long. I had no idea it was so late." She rose from the railing, offered him a cool hand and firm pressure, and said, " Good-bye then," went to her car, and drove off.

Tim stood looking after her, filled with the wonderful sensation of having found an ally. " What a funny kid," he said to himself. Scruffy appeared on the concrete platform, bounced up and down on all fours, coughed and cursed. " What a jolly good kid," Captain Bailey said aloud. And then, addressing the big Macaque, " You wouldn't care to take a bite out of the other hand, would you, chum? "

Arrived home at their flower-trellised Georgian mansion, Felicity abandoned her car in the gravel forecourt and went banging

next month . . .

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happily through the house with all the joy and energy of her twenty-two years.

Eventually her ebullience washed over her mother, who was working on a piece of tapestry by the big picture window in the drawing-room that overlooked the sea and the dockyard. Felicity's chubbiness did not stem from her but from her father. Lady French was tall, slender, and cool. Her hair was still golden; she had been a great beauty. When she had married the consensus was that she had thrown herself away. But now she was Lady French, and an Admiral's wife, so it actually had worked out all for the best. Still, it might not have done, and she had a quiet determination that her daughter Felicity should not expose herself to the same hazard. She was glad she had her come out to the Rock for the summer. In one sense it was a small, narrow, tight-fitting community, but as a Navy and Colonial base it was full of eligible young men of good families on the threshold of important careers.

Lady French looked up from completing a stitch and said, "Felicity, darling, must you make so much noise? You know, you aren't sixteen any more. In fact, you'll have to be thinking very soon of—"

"Getting married," Felicity completed for her, for this was one she had heard before. "I think of it all of the time, Mummy. Guess what! I've just met the nicest young man. Maybe I could marry him."

Lady French was startled by this announcement, for she never knew when her daughter was joking. But ladies, in the lexicon of the Admiral's wife, did not show emotion. She disciplined herself with three more stitches before she replied, "Really, dear? How very nice. Is it anyone we know?"

Felicity's lovely clear eyes were bent upon her mother with an expression of quizzical tenderness. She replied, "Captain Bailey."

Lady French sent the blunted needle four more times through and back, drawing the piece of red wool after it while she assessed rapidly the information her daughter had revealed. Like all mothers she felt that every young man her daughter met was a potential husband. A Captain was starting close to the top indeed; at the same time it posed another problem.

"My dear," she said, "isn't the company of a Captain a little bit old for you?" She lifted her own beautiful golden head and looked out across the town to the mole. There was nothing there but a pair of destroyers already tied up for a fortnight, a Naval collier, and a couple of rusty freighters, plus the cruise ship. A puzzled frown now appeared upon her own handsome brow and she murmured, "*Captain* Bailey? Is there any ship in now with a Captain Bailey?"

Felicity struggled and won the battle to keep the corners of her mouth from twitching. She felt somehow that she ought to say, "Hang on to your needlework, Mum, this is going to be a real snorter." But she refrained, and instead said demurely, "Captain Timothy Bailey of the Royal Artillery, Mother. Army."

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The tapestry needle was blunt, but Lady French still managed to run it into the end of her finger. She then let fly a good round Navy swearword she had learnt from her husband. Thereupon, as she sucked at the drop of blood that appeared on her finger, the lady inside Lady French scored one more imperishable triumph. She said quite quietly, " Oh no, Felicity; not Army, surely? "

Felicity said, " Yes, Mother, Army."

Lady French then asked, " Who is he? " Three words which in these circumstances constituted a three-page questionnaire and included such vital items as: What is his family? Who is his father? What was his mother's maiden name? What, if any, armorial bearings? Have they any money? What schools did he attend? Is he at the very least the General's A.D.C. and headed for Staff College?

Felicity thought that she might as well complete the job, since her mother was really bearing up wonderfully. She said, " He's OIC—Officer in Charge—of Apes."

Lady French was sometimes afflicted by the tortures of sinus, and found that smelling-salts offered a certain relief. She now laid down her tapestry, opened her nearby handbag, took out the bottle of smelling-salts, removed the stopper, and took two deep whiffs that brought tears to her eyes.

By the time she had wiped them away she was able to speak. " Well, I wouldn't mention this young man to your father if I were you. You know how he feels about the Army. He's in a state anyway; the Brigadier is coming for dinner tonight. We're dressing, of course. Do try to do your hair nicely for once, Felicity. I don't think your father likes the Brigadier very much—he never lets him get a word in edgeways. It's Army, Army, Army, when he comes."

And indeed it was so at the dinner party that night. The Admiral never did get to hold forth, for the Brigadier was loaded to the back of his teeth with narrative anent the depredations committed by one of those confounded Rock apes, a creature by the name of Scruffy, who had invaded the town that day and wrought enough damage as might well cause an investigating committee from Parliament to descend upon them.

It was apes this, and apes that, filthy destructive beasts, and gradually through the Brigadier's fulminations the name of Captain Bailey surfaced. Impudent, time-wasting young cub. The name of Scruffy receded into the background and that of Captain Timothy Bailey took over.

Lady French paled beneath her make-up, but never once wavered in the elegant and delicate dissection of the portion of fish upon her plate. She did, however, manage to throw one glance of anguish at her daughter, who sat at the opposite side next to the Brigadier's handsome young Staff Captain, to whom she was paying not the slightest attention.

Felicity had done the best she could with her unruly hair, and

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had plastered it down with water, but now it was drying and beginning to stick up. Her attention was bent upon the Brigadier. She was drinking in every word he was saying, and absolutely glowing with pride and happiness.

Lady French suddenly felt she didn't care for any more fish. It seemed that everything that was wrong with, on, in, around and about Gibraltar might now safely be laid at the door of a congenital idiot named Bailey.

It was the Admiral who later asked the question which was on all lips. "D'you think there is going to be a war, Brigadier?"

The Commander of the Artillery Brigade did not fuff and huff and pontificate, but suddenly looked a little grey, worried, and tired as he replied with the earnestness of a man who has been thinking of little else. "Yes, I am afraid there will be. And very soon; too soon for us."

With the coming of the war, life on the Rock had remained basically unchanged, but the war had radically altered the plans of Miss Felicity French and turned them from immediate wedding bells to serious reflections as to how best to arrange the future intelligently and satisfactorily. Felicity was not the daughter of an Admiral for nothing. She was likewise far-sighted.

In the ordinary way of affairs, had there not been a war, propinquity and Felicity would have continued to soften up Captain Bailey as well as the opposition of her parents. Now, other considerations intruded, such as for instance serving her country.

At the same time, being a woman and having thus properly put first things first, she saw no reason why they could not be combined with her other designs. She remembered what Tim had told her about the existence of an evacuation plan of women and children from Gibraltar. If such a plan were put into effect, the only women who could remain upon the Rock would be those in service. There was no reason why with her intelligence and connections she should not be one of these. At the same time, if she were already married, she would never be accepted by the WRNS. In the meantime, Tim had not yet mentioned the subject. The apes and his emergency plans for them were taking up a good deal of his time.

Christmas had come and gone. 1940 had been ushered in, and the war was still static with the French manning the Maginot Line. It was time, Felicity thought, to put her plan into action.

They were working upon a young female ape at the small ape clinic set up in St. Michael's Hut. Her name was Juliette, she was nine months old, and had suffered a deep gash from a bite on her buttocks inflicted, of course, by Scruffy.

Felicity subscribed to the theory that a man is more likely to succumb to a female who makes herself a partner in his games and hobbies. If Tim's concern and passion was apes, then so was hers. She had made herself almost indispensable to him, accompanying

him on his rounds of the apes' village and helping him during the minor emergencies and surgeries that arose, and soon had found herself happily accepted as his second pair of hands.

The apelet was on her stomach and was being held down by Tim while Felicity cleansed the wound and prepared to apply an antiseptic. The monkey had managed to twist its head about and was regarding Felicity with some anxiety, but also with trust and love.

" It's going to sting for just a minute," Felicity said to the apelet, as though she were addressing a child, " but after that it's going to be all better."

With firm practised fingers she washed away the dried, coagulated blood. Juliette squirmed.

" Hold still, you little devil, will you," said Tim. " Stop making things more difficult. We're only doing this for your own good." He bent over and peered into the wound now exposed. " Hm, nasty! "

Felicity swabbed it dry once more and poured the antiseptic on a bit of gauze. " If they'd only listen to you about the cages," she said, " these things wouldn't happen. Poor little darling."

" Or at least supply us with a proper vet. That cut could do with a stitch or two."

" One isn't supposed to mind having a scar *there*," Felicity observed. " She'll have one too. Now then." She applied the

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gauze. Juliette screamed like a child, then squirmed and whimpered.

Tim said soothingly, "Come on, old girl, it isn't all that bad." And then to Felicity, "Isn't it awful to have to hurt them?"

They smiled at one another across the table, and Felicity said, "What a good kind man you are, Tim."

The Captain flew into a perfect panic of embarrassment. "Nonsense," he replied, "absolute rotter."

"Tim."

"Yes."

"I've been thinking," Felicity began. Juliette took up her attention for another instant—"Oh, do hold her still for another second, can you?"—and then, "I've been thinking we could get married after I come back. Mother will fuss dreadfully, of course."

"Will she?" said Tim, in a voice of a man whose mind is elsewhere, but who nevertheless has heard the question. "I don't suppose there's any use trying to keep a bandage on her, particularly on her rear. She'd have it off in a second. We'll just have to keep catching her and cleaning it until it's healed. Oh lord! Your mother, you mean!" he shouted suddenly as the full import of Felicity's last remark penetrated, and then, "What do you mean—when you come back?"

"I'm going to volunteer for the WRNS. I'm going to learn coding and signalling and be made an officer with privileges and use Daddy's name and be sent back here. Then I thought—"

Tim was suddenly looking at her with a curious fierceness. "You are not to come back, Felicity. I don't want you to."

"Are you being unkind, Tim?"

"Huh! Unkind! After what I told you about those German guns. They've sprouted a new lot, a regular plantation. I don't want you dismembered." His gaze was now direct and revealing. "I want you membered."

"And you?" queried Felicity.

"I'm in the business," Tim replied briefly. "I shall get under a table."

"Oh, Tim," Felicity wailed, "why couldn't you have been a Swiss clockmaker?" She took a tube of soothing antibiotic salve and squeezed some into the wound. Juliette squeaked, and they began to laugh. They both suddenly felt themselves singularly happy. Felicity murmured, "Juliette, Juliette, wherefore art thou Juliette? Oh dear, that isn't right, is it?"

Tim asked, "Would she really kick up a row?"

"Oh yes. And Daddy will too."

Tim reflected, "I imagine he will. I would. All done? I can't hold her much longer."

Felicity replied, "Sissy!" and wiped the edges of the wound clear. Then she said, "Tim, would you rather not marry me?"

Captain Bailey cried, "Oh my God, Felicity!" and in the exclamation managed to express such an abysmal horror at the

thought of not marrying her that he conveyed all that she needed to know.

"I oughtn't to be gone more than six months," Felicity said, "seven at the most, but as soon as I have my commission—"

Tim said, "Look here, Felicity, I haven't got a bean, you know."

"Neither have I. No expectations either. Not a single rich relative. And I shall enjoy being a burden to you."

"Life on a Captain's pay—"

"Bliss." Then Felicity blinked her eyes clear of two large tears which somehow had suddenly formed there and added, "You don't mind that I'm too fat? And not very pretty? I can cook. I mean really, not play cooking."

"Felicity!" Tim cried once more in a perfect agony of frustration. And once more he packed into her name whole pages of unspoken emotional literature, and then somehow found some words.

"How the devil can a man hang on to a confounded wounded she-ape and at the same time tell someone what he feels—the magnitude of it—the awesomeness of it all—I mean how it makes you think you don't know whether you're going to burst into tears or laugh or fall down in a dead faint. It sort of tears you to pieces inside and makes you all giddy and sick and at the same time you want to yell at the top of your lungs."

"Oh, Tim," Felicity said, "you make love so beautifully. You can let her go now."

Tim did so and reached for Felicity, but Juliette was quicker than he. In a flash the little apelet was up from the table, had leapt on to Felicity's bosom and wrapped both her arms about her neck. She turned her wizened face towards Tim, bared her small fangs, and scolded and chittered at him angrily.

Felicity held her close and murmured, "Hush, little one, you mustn't be jealous. He loves me."

She put her chin down upon the little head and looked across the table at Tim, and on her face was an expression of tenderness which pierced the man and left him shaking with the love that he was experiencing for this odd, kind, and rather wonderful girl.

"There's all the rest of the time for us," she said, and then added, "dear Tim."

Ten days later Felicity sailed for England to volunteer for the WRNS. Because of the war there was no formal announcement of engagement. She and Tim parted with the understanding that when she returned with her commission they would be married.

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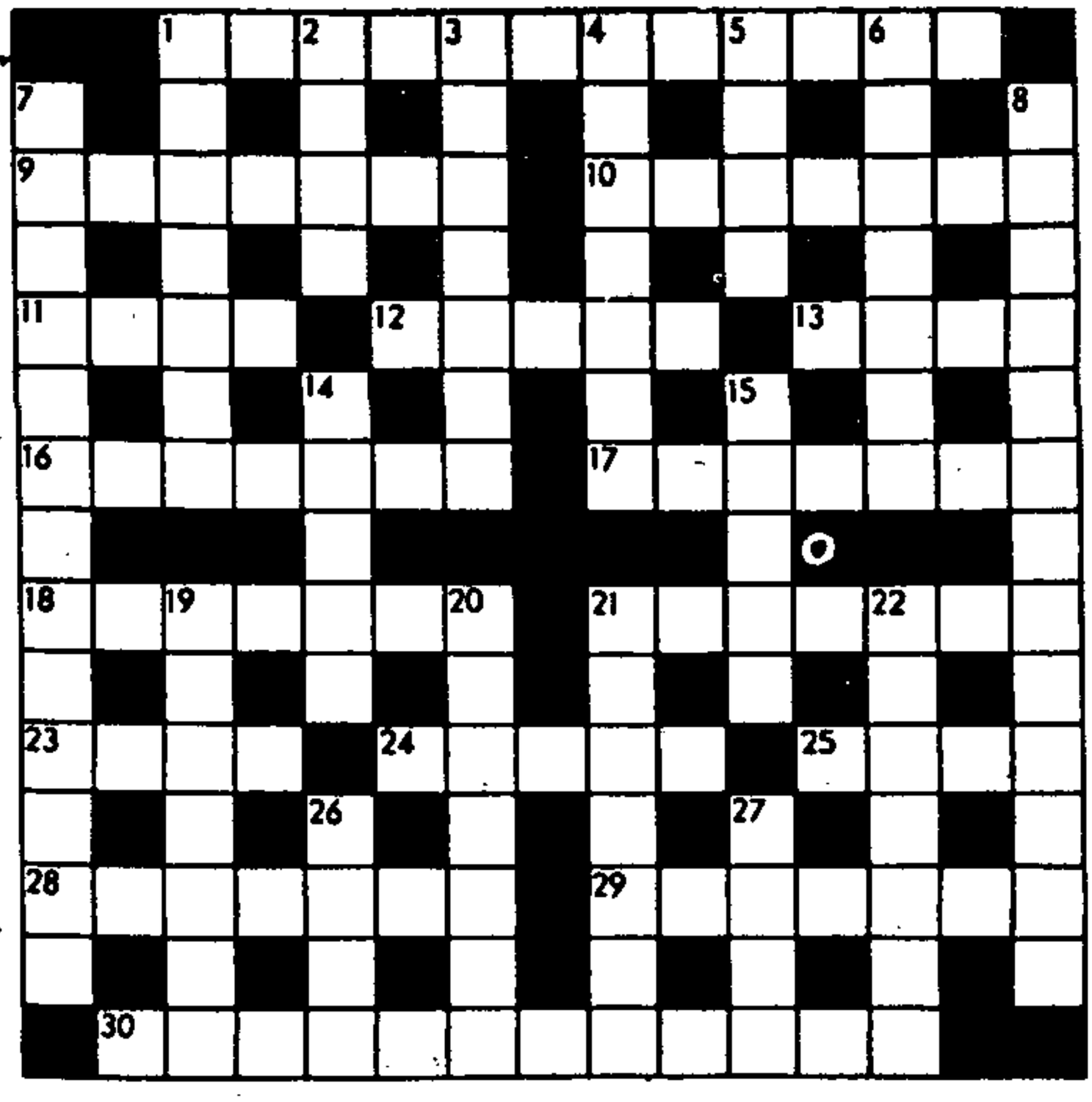
★ ***Hilarious new chapters from Scruffy by Paul Gallico in next month's ARGOSY on sale March 9***

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 37



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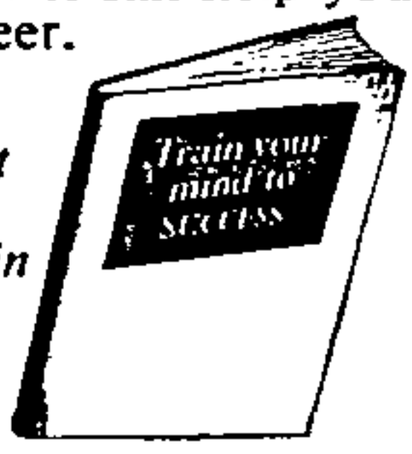

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